

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM IN ENGLAND
1883-1914.**

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This thesis is my own original work.

Mandy Hearn

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between feminism and socialism in England during the period 1883 to 1914. Through an examination of the ideological inheritance of feminism and socialism from the end of the eighteenth century, the socialist revival in the 1880s, the development of the Independent Labour Party and the formation of women's trade union, suffrage and political groups, two related problematics have been identified as having a significant impact upon that relationship. These problematics are, for feminism, difference and equality, and for socialism, independence and alliance.

Three related themes - consciousness, subjectivity and common sense - have been further identified as instrumental in the process by which the feminist and socialist problematics led to the development of a number of different feminisms and socialisms evident in England at this time. It is argued that gendered ideology - the allocation of separate spheres to women and men, and an intrinsic notion of difference based upon that separation - entered and divided feminism and socialism at the moment of their formation. It also framed part of the common sense of both women and men. As such, therefore, the struggle for a feminist and socialist future needed to be waged at this level of common sense.

The majority of feminists and socialists were, however, unable to conduct their struggles at this level. Instead, what emerged as dominant was a version of socialism which was morally conservative on issues to do with women and the family. Gendered ideology thus was not transcended. What emerged as the dominant strand within feminism was an ideology of motherhood, which pressed women's claims on the basis of their difference from men. There was nothing guaranteed about either of these developments; rather, they were both the result of a complex process of negotiation against the background of a society in a state of change.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. Abbreviations used in the text:

| | |
|-------|---|
| BSP | British Socialist Party |
| FWG | Fabian Women's Group |
| ILP | Independent Labour Party |
| LRC | Labour Representation Committee |
| NAC | National Administrative Council |
| NESWS | North of England Society for Women's Suffrage |
| NFWW | National Federation of Women Workers |
| NUWSS | National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies |
| SDP | Social Democratic Party |
| SDF | Social Democratic Federation |
| SLP | Socialist Labour Party |
| SMNF | Scottish Miners' National Federation |
| TUC | Trades Union Congress |
| WCG | Women's Co-operative Guild |
| WFL | Women's Freedom League |
| WIC | Women's Industrial Council |
| WLL | Women's Labour League |
| WPPL | Women's Protective and Provident League |

WSPU Women's Social and Political Union

WTUA Women's Trade Union Association

WTUL Women's Trade Union League

2. Abbreviations used in the footnotes:

Apart from the abbreviations listed above, these refer exclusively to microform collections. Complete bibliographic details are therefore to be found in the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is not an original study of either the feminist or the socialist movements in the period 1883-1914. The originality of this thesis lies rather in its construction of an interpretive framework, informed by present-day feminist and socialist theory, which is designed specifically to elucidate the relationship between feminism and socialism in a past which was structured by gender and class. By analysing statements and actions of feminists and socialists, within their own historically specific context, it attempts to illuminate the complexities within and connections between the various strands of feminism and socialism which are evident during this period. It is written from the perspective of one who believes that a close relationship between the two is not only desirable but has occurred in certain historical contexts. The aim of this thesis, then, is to uncover those moments when feminism and socialism were closely allied and to explore the reasons why the relationship between the two has also been fraught with tensions and difficulties.

The year 1883 has been chosen to open this thesis because it appeared to mark a high point in nineteenth-century feminist activity. In that year the campaigners for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts achieved a notable victory when the clauses in the Acts concerning the compulsory examination of women were suspended, leading to their being repealed altogether in 1886.¹ That same year, women's suffrage campaigners convinced the National Conference of the Liberal Party to add women to any proposed suffrage measure.² In addition, in 1883 an organisation of working-class women, the Women's Co-operative Guild, was formed. It

¹ For a fuller discussion of the significance of this see Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class and The State, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980. pp. 98-99.

² See Marion Ramelson, The Petticoat Rebellion. A Century of Struggle For Women's Rights, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1972. pp. 92-93.

went on to become in the early twentieth century an important body for the safeguarding of the interests and welfare of married working-class women in particular. The year 1883 has significance for socialism too. In that year Karl Marx died in London. Just one year later three independent socialist organisations had emerged; the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League and the Fabian Society. I have chosen to end this thesis with the outbreak of war in 1914. The war had an enormous impact upon feminist and socialist organisations which would require another thesis in itself to do justice to. Therefore 1914 may be regarded as something of a watershed for both movements.

There are a number of theoretical issues which are particularly relevant to this project. The first theoretical issue concerns the question of women's 'nature' and gender difference. Arabella Shore³ said in 1877:

But one would like to know, when it is so glibly said that Nature is opposed to this or that, what is meant by Nature. Is it ancient usage or established convention, the law or custom of our country, training, social position, the speaker's own particular fancy or prejudice, or what? And when Nature has been defined, one would like to have defined what particular actions are, or are not, against that aforesaid Nature.⁴

These words highlight the problems encountered by many feminists in Western societies. By challenging the ideology of a timeless, fixed category of female nature, feminists have sought to illuminate the social, political and ideological content of 'taken for granted' perceptions of the world. This challenge has taken the specific form of questioning the actual categories

³ Arabella Shore was a regular itinerant lecturer for the National Society for Women's Suffrage in the 1870s, and she also had contact with the Women's Protective and Provident League during this decade. See Patricia Hollis, ed., Women in Public: The Women's Movement 1850-1900 George Allen & Unwin, London 1979. pp. 111 & 283. Further biographical details have proved impossible to obtain.

⁴ Arabella Shore, Present Aspect of Women's Suffrage Considered. (1877) Maidenhead 1897. p.19.

of 'woman' and 'man' themselves. As Jill Matthews has written: 'Woman is a social being, created within and by a specific society.'⁵ That is, while the sexes are biologically grounded the meaning of what it is to be either a woman or a man has changed through time.⁶

However, recent feminist writing, emanating predominantly from Britain and the United States, has expressed alarm at certain developments within feminism in the 1970s and 1980s which both stress and celebrate gender difference.⁷ In this development they have seen a parallel with a similar shift within feminist debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which led ultimately to the removal of feminist aims from the political agenda and the demise of 'first wave' feminism. For it is argued by these authors that this shift in feminist debates constitutes a retrogressive step in the struggle for liberation which denies the important theoretical breakthrough within feminism which perceived gender as a social category, a construct, and sex as a biological fact.⁸ It is further argued that such a perspective offers an undifferentiated view of women and men which locks feminists irrevocably into an essentialist circularity. One of the tasks of this thesis will be to elucidate whether such a shift in feminist thought, from an understanding of the social construction of gender

⁵ Jill Matthews, Good and Mad Women. The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia George Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1984. p. 5.

⁶ This is not to suggest that human bodies have remained static over time. But however much they may have changed in appearance the two distinct biological categories of female and male have remained constant.

⁷ See particularly, Lynne Segal, Is The Future Female? Troubled Thoughts On Contemporary Feminism, Virago, London 1987. Introduction; Elizabeth Wilson & Angela Weir, 'The British Women's Movement', in Elizabeth Wilson, Hidden Agendas. Theory, Politics, and Experience in the Women's Movement, Tavistock Publications, London 1986. pp. 101-102; and Linda Gordon, 'What's New In Women's History', in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., Feminist Studies/Critical Studies Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1986. pp. 20-30.

⁸ See Ann Oakley, Sex, Gender and Society, Harper & Row, New York 1972. p. 16.

to a celebration of gender difference, did occur in the period under examination.

All three protagonists in this debate, cited above, are socialist feminists, at least two of whom would also call themselves marxists.⁹ This particular debate reflects the political concerns of and divisions within contemporary feminism. It is apparent now, twenty years after the rise of 'second wave' feminism, that formal equality in the form of such legislation as the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts in Britain in the 1970s has not resulted in a substantive change in women's position within society as a whole. For example, from 1966 women have steadily increased their participation in the paid workforce in Britain, from 36.1% to 45.7% in 1988, but they have primarily done so as part-time workers, thereby enjoying few of the benefits that accrue to full-time workers.¹⁰ This is but one of the many contradictions which have emerged in the last two decades. The disillusionment with reform through legislation to produce equality for women - whether substantive or formal - has led to the articulation of a number of quite distinct theoretical positions within feminism, united nonetheless by their concern with the subject 'woman' and the notion of 'difference'.¹¹

On the one hand, some feminists have focussed upon sexuality and pornography to show that women's oppression is the result of male violence - both psychic and physical. In the work of radical feminists such as Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin and Dale Spender, in particular, the corollary of the

⁹ See, for example, the interview with Linda Gordon in MARHO, Visions of History, Pantheon, New York 1983. pp. 71-96; see also 'Feminism and Class Politics: A Round-Table Discussion', Feminist Review, No. 23. 1986. pp. 13-30.

¹⁰ The figures are cited in Sylvia Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy, Blackwell, Oxford 1990. p. 26.

¹¹ For an article which explores the different meanings attached to 'difference' see Michele Barrett, 'The Concept of 'Difference''. Feminist Review, No. 26, July 1987. pp. 29-41.

violent male is the female victim.¹² In their view, the only way for women to gain strength is to disengage from this violence and actively create an alternative culture based upon 'women's' values. This is the essentialism which Lynne Segal, in particular, has rigorously attacked for in her view it amounts to a withdrawal from the world of struggle and political engagement. On the other hand, feminist theorists have denied that such a simplistic solution is possible by looking at the processes whereby women acquire notions of womanhood and femininity. Drawing upon the work of post-modernists such as Lacan and Foucault, marxist feminists such as those associated with the journal m/f argue that there can be no such thing as a unitary female 'subject' - to argue for this, they claim, is to operate within essentialist and humanist paradigms¹³ - but a number of 'subjects' constructed through and structured by a number of different discourses.¹⁴ Thus the meaning of what it is to be a woman and our acquisition of a gendered subjectivity is hotly debated within modern feminism.

Just as it is impossible to speak of one feminism today, so too is it impossible to talk of one tradition of feminist historiography. Feminist historians have both contributed and responded to the political changes within the feminist movement over the last two decades. The link between feminist history and politics has always been strong. Indeed, the first comprehensive history of the women's movement was written by Ray

¹² See for example, Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. The Women's Press, London 1978; Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating. E.P.Dutton, New York 1974; and Dale Spender, Women of Ideas (and What Men Have Done to Them), Ark Paperbacks, London 1983.

¹³ Parveen Adams & Jeff Minson, 'The 'Subject' of Feminism'. m/f No. 2. 1978. pp. 43-61.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.3. For a critique of this position see Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today. Problems in Marxist Feminist Analyses. Verso, London 1980. pp. 86-113. See also the debate between Barrett and Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas in New Left Review No. 144 1984 pp. 33-71 & No. 146 1984 pp. 123-128..

Strachey in 1928 following her long involvement with the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.¹⁵

Historians Patricia Hilden and Joan Scott have each identified three, albeit different, approaches to women's history. For Hilden these are: combatant history, designed to 'mobilize a hitherto complacent constituency'; separate-sphere history, 'which argued for the equal status of women's putative separate place'; and, finally, compensatory or dragnet history concerned to state the facts primarily through examinations of women's political and economic activity. The first approach Hilden characterises was relatively short-lived mainly because it adopted an exhortative position more suited to feminist magazines with their injunctions to immediate political action. The second approach has proved more enduring because of the failure of legislation to produce equality between women and men. The final approach Hilden sees as potentially the most promising but only if it ventures beyond simply restoring the facts. In effect, Hilden argues that the most fruitful approach for feminist historians is one that restores agency to women - a feminist history with the politics back in.¹⁶ For Joan Scott, whose examination starts at the point where Hilden's left off by acknowledging that most women's historians *are* now engaged in the project of re-writing history, the three major approaches to women's history are: first, 'the recovery of information and the focus on female subjects' - which seems to correspond roughly to Hilden's categories of both compensatory and separate-sphere history; second, the challenge as to whether standards of periodisation and notions of progress or regress which are applicable to men have a similar validity for women; thirdly, and more rarely in her view, approaches which join the evidence about women

¹⁵ Ray Strachey, The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928). Reprinted Virago Press, London 1978.

¹⁶ Patricia Hilden, 'Women's History: The Second Wave'. The Historical Journal. Vol. 25, No. 2 1982. pp. 501-512.

explicitly to mainstream political and social history. It is this third approach which Scott finds most fruitful:

The point is to examine social definitions of gender as they are developed by men and women, constructed in and affected by economic and political institutions, expressive of a range of relationships which included not only sex, but class and power. The results throw new light not only on women's experience, but on social and political practice as well.¹⁷

Despite their different typologies, Hilden and Scott reach similar conclusions regarding the realisation of the project of re-writing history, although gender as an analytical tool is made explicit by Scott whereas it is only implicit in Hilden's statements. It is an approach, however, which is shared by a number of feminist historians.¹⁸ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has argued: 'The primary theoretical implication of the confrontation between women's history and official history is this recognition of gender system as a primary category of historical analysis - as deeply ingrained in social and economic formations and the political institutions to which they give rise as class relations'.¹⁹ Inserting gender as an analytical tool into historical research promises far more than a simple celebration of women's past achievements.

For in truth, the undervaluation of women has not only led to the slighting of women's participation in slave revolts, *jacqueries*, strikes and revolutions; it has also led to the slighting of their formidable contribution to the building of slave societies, the suppression of

¹⁷ Joan W. Scott, 'Women in History II The Modern Period'. Past and Present. No. 101. November 1983. p. 153.

¹⁸ See, for example, Jill Matthews, 'Feminist History'. Labour History No. 50. May 1986 pp. 147-153. For a critique of the use of gender see Moira Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction', in Judith Allen & Paul Patton, eds, Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx. Intervention Publications, Leichhardt, N.S.W. 1983. pp. 143-162.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'Placing Women's History In History'. New Left Review. No. 133. 1982. pp. 14-15.

jacqueries, the consolidation of big business and the efforts at counter-revolution.²⁰

This is a crucial point and one with which Linda Gordon concurs in her work on family violence where she has shown that women were both abused and abusers.²¹ An examination of the effects of gender, then, threatens to disturb the public/private dyad by elucidating the 'reciprocal nature of gender and society...in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics'.²² It also enables us to understand that women's actions are not always necessarily progressive. In relation to the nineteenth-century American women's movement, for example, Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois have characterised it as conservative with regard to sexuality because 'the nineteenth-century feminist mainstream accepted women's sexual powerlessness with men as inevitable, even as they sought to protect women from its worst consequences'.²³ In response Sheila Jeffreys has explicitly denied that women's involvement in moral purity campaigns could have a conservative as well as a progressive side.²⁴ This 'separate-sphere' approach to history fails to take into account the manner in which women acquiesce in as well as resist oppression; that women are neither completely the victims of a timeless male oppressor nor totally active agents of resistance.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 29.

²¹ Linda Gordon, Heroes of Their Own Lives. The Politics and History of Family Violence. Virago Press, London 1989.

²² Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', in Elizabeth Weed, ed., Coming To Terms. Feminism, Theory, Politics. Routledge, New York 1989. p. 96.

²³ Linda Gordon & Ellen DuBois, 'Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Sexual Thought'. Feminist Review. No. 13, February 1983. pp. 42-54. Especially p. 43.

²⁴ Sheila Jeffreys, The Spinster and Her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930. Pandora, London 1985. See especially pp. 195-196 where Jeffreys takes Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois to task for suggesting this point.

The crux of this debate is whether an examination of women's agency in the past can be elucidated through an exclusive focus upon women's assertion of autonomy and difference from men and male values or whether an understanding of the historical operation of gender reveals a more complex picture. In his now famous work, E. P. Thompson wrote with regard to class:

[T]he notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship....The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context. Moreover, we cannot have two distinct classes, each with an independent being, and then bring them *into* relationship with each other. We cannot have love without lovers, nor deference without squires and labourers.²⁵

Similarly, with regard to gender it can be argued, we cannot understand women without also understanding men. In particular, we cannot understand women as historical agents without also analysing how that agency related to the wider social and political context through which it was expressed. Thus, a second task of this thesis will be to examine how notions of gender affected men as well as women and how gender was embedded in all facets of social existence.

In America the question of women's autonomy and difference has become enmeshed in a debate over a perceived division between politics and culture; over whether the primary focus for feminist historians should be feminist political movements or the exploration of women's private worlds. In her contribution Ellen DuBois argues that there is no linear development from women's culture to feminist protest, indeed, the two need to be seen in a dialectical relationship to each other.²⁶ Her major criticism, especially with regard to the work of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, is that to focus

²⁵ E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class. Penguin, Harmondsworth. 1968. p. 9.

²⁶ Ellen DuBois, 'Politics and Culture In Women's History: A Symposium'. Feminist Studies Vol. 6, No. 1. 1980. p. 30.

exclusively on women's culture renders that work isolationist; it is not related to 'larger social and historical developments' and so tends to ignore the specific ways in which women have been oppressed at the expense of emphasising resistance within women's personal lives. In effect, she argues, that to focus upon resistance in women's culture ignores that culture's own limitations in the way it also confined women and in its frequent hostility to feminist politics.²⁷ In response, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues for the analytical distinction and autonomy of women's culture.²⁸ She writes: 'Only by studying women's interaction with each other can we begin to untangle the intricate relation between the female world and the economic and institutional power structure of the "external world".'¹⁰ Therefore, 'the pressing questions about feminism centre on its relation to the existence of a female world'.²⁹ The influence of contemporary feminist theory is clear in this exchange. On the one hand, an emphasis upon politics is said to elucidate the ways in which women have sought equality by actively challenging male oppression through feminist movements and, on the other hand, an investigation of women's culture will illuminate the ways in which women have created their own world different from, and in resistance to, that of men.

This debate, as constructed in this rather antagonistic manner, raises more questions than it answers. Firstly, it appears to rest upon an explicit theoretical distinction between the public and the private spheres. Either women existed "in public", challenging male oppression through organised feminist movements, or they developed an autonomous culture as an act of resistance to the dominant male ideology. By giving priority to either one of these a false division is maintained which itself reproduces the nineteenth

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 58. Although, confusingly, she later denies this. See p. 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 62.

century view of the world. As Joan Kelly has said: '*woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally*'. By recognising this, 'feminist thought is moving beyond the split vision of social reality it inherited from the recent past'.³⁰ Secondly, missing from both these accounts altogether is a sense of class. The 'subjects' of both accounts are, implicitly, bourgeois women and are assumed to speak for all women. In her contribution to this debate Temma Kaplan addresses both the issue of women's autonomy and that of class. She argues: 'It is impossible to speak of "women's culture" without understanding its variation by class and ethnic group. Women's culture, like popular or working-class culture, must appear in the context of dominant cultures'.³¹ An analysis of class, she continues, applied to women's movements, organisations and cultures will 'illuminate female lives in ways that focussing solely upon women's culture or feminism does not'.³²

This brings us to the second theoretical issue of relevance for this project; the relationship between gender and class priorities. In much British feminist historiography class has just this centrality which is lacking in the above debate between DuBois and Smith-Rosenberg over politics and culture. As Jane Rendell has written: 'The political language and the objectives of both women and men were structured partly by their class and partly by their gender'.³³ It is in this complex interweaving of class and gender, rather than in a debate over the relative merits of politics and culture, that British feminist historians have identified a tension

³⁰ Joan Kelly, 'The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory', in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan & Judith R. Walkowitz, eds., Sex and Class in Women's History, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1983. pp. 264 & 265. Author's emphasis.

³¹ Temma Kaplan, 'Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium. p. 44.

³² *Ibid.* p. 47.

³³ Jane Rendell, ed, Equal Or Different. Women's Politics 1800-1914, Blackwell, Oxford 1987. p. 1.

between arguments for equality and arguments for difference. As Rendell again states: 'the status of women will vary with the extent of the divergence between public and private worlds, and...there were two possible routes for women excluded from the world of authority and activity, in the claiming of equality or the assertion of difference.' Whilst clearly sympathetic to the cultural side of the politics/culture debate, in the sense that one cannot understand the language women used in public without also understanding women's private lives, Rendell, like Joan Kelly, argues that to accept a dichotomy between public and private worlds means retaining dependence upon 'the nineteenth century view of the public sphere'.³⁴

In her study of gender and class in the 1830s and 1840s Sally Alexander has also identified a tension between equality and difference. She argues:

If feminism's underlying demand is for women's full inclusion in humanity, (whether that inclusion is strategically posed in terms of equal rights, socialism or millenarianism) then the dilemma for a feminist political strategy may be summed up in the tension between the plea for equality and the assertion of sexual difference. If the sexes are different, then how may that difference (and all that it implies for the relative needs and desires of women and men) be represented throughout culture without the sex that is different becoming subordinated.³⁵

Despite the fact that women's demands have always in themselves been eminently reasonable - after all, no more than men have demanded for themselves - Alexander continues, such demands have been perceived as deeply disturbing because ultimately they threaten social organisation as a whole. Neither Marxism, with its priority given to analyses of class struggle, nor radical feminism, with its insistence upon a timeless male oppressor, can resolve this tension. It must be understood at the level of

³⁴ Ibid. p. 4.

³⁵ Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History'. History Workshop Journal. Issue 17. Spring 1984. p. 126.

sexual identity and subjectivity. Ultimately, though, Alexander presents a highly pessimistic picture:

Both feminism and psychoanalysis suggest (in different ways), and history appears to confirm their findings, that antagonism between the sexes is an unavoidable aspect of the acquisition of sexual identity...If antagonism is always latent, it is possible that history offers no final resolution, only the constant reshaping, reorganising of the symbolization of difference, and the sexual division of labour.³⁶

Alexander's reliance upon Lacanian psychoanalysis and post-Saussurian linguistics, like the work presented in the journal *m/f*, posits subjectivity as fractured, fragmented, unstable and antagonistic. Subjectivity itself is constructed through a series of differences and differentiations. Whilst this moves beyond the simplistic assertions of universal male oppression, subscribed to by those feminist theorists mentioned earlier who advocate women construct their own alternative and essentially different world, for the historian it poses considerable problems because it appears to reduce humanity to a mass of individuated, atomised and antagonistic beings always in conflict. It leaves the historian with little hope of describing or understanding acts of collective resistance or oppression. For feminist historians the problem remains: how are we to understand and interpret women's claims for equality and their assertion of difference in a past which was structured by gender and class.

In their work on the English middle class, Leonore Davidoff and Cathherine Hall demonstrate that it is possible for historians to elucidate these conflicts within specific historical contexts. Their work starts with the premise:

[T]hat identity is gendered and that the organisation of sexual difference is central to the social world...That sexual identity is organised through a complex system of social relations, structured by the institutions not only of family and kinship but at every level of the

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 134-135.

legal, political, economic and social formation. Neither these identities nor institutional practices are fixed and immutable. 'Masculinity' and 'femininity' are constructs specific to historical time and place.³⁷

Their work also focuses on 'the gendered nature of class formation and the way sexual difference always influences class formation.'³⁸ These twin axes of analysis, with priority given to gender, have allowed them to see how the formation of the English middle class between 1780 and 1850 was the result of an active struggle to specifically shape and order gender and class relations in the context of developing industrialisation which threatened to disrupt those very relations.

In an earlier paper, Davidoff showed the effects of the cosmology developed by this English middle class upon a later Victorian generation, particularly with regard to the relationship between Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick. In this quite remarkable article Davidoff analyses the ways in which Munby and Cullwick acted out their relative positions according to their respective classes and genders *and* simultaneously transformed those positions. Preoccupied by the series of dichotomies inherent to Victorian life such as male/female, middle class/working class, and their sub-sets, black/white, clean/dirty, Munby and Cullwick attempted to invert those oppositions in their private lives whilst presenting to the world the conforming image of a master and his servant. The resultant stresses experienced by both Munby and Cullwick revealed the deep contradictions which riddled Victorian England and the manner in which gender and class were deeply embedded in the psychical and social worlds.³⁹

³⁷ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes. Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850 Hutchinson, London 1987. p. 29.

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 30.

³⁹ Leonore Davidoff, 'Class and Gender in Victorian England', in Sex and Class in Women's History, pp. 17-71.

In this article the acquisition of a gendered and classed subjectivity is seen to be problematic but not, I would argue, fragmented in the sense proposed by Alexander.

Analyses of gender and class clearly have an especial relevance to studies of feminism and socialism. They are, for example, central to Barbara Taylor's work on Owenite socialism and Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks' work on the later nineteenth century. Taylor's work is framed by two questions - one historical the other contemporary. Her historical question concerns how 'women's emancipation became part of the ideological armoury of a popular social movement, and inspired attempts to construct a new sexual culture in a society riven with sex- and class-based conflicts'. Her contemporary question concerns the significance of the failure of a vision of a society in which gender and class conflict has been abolished for feminist socialist politics today.⁴⁰ Through an examination of the Owenites' attitude to marriage, religion and work, Taylor challenges the 'Whig' interpretation of the labour movement - 'the forward march of labour'⁴¹ - from the perspective of a 'forgotten' relationship between feminism and socialism.⁴² Taylor's work meshes with that of Davidoff and Hall. Like the men and women of the middle class, the Owenites were attempting to remodel society in a time of social and economic change. But the Owenite ideas remained a decidedly minority creed among the working class. The reasons for this were many and complex, but the reality of working class existence, when gender and class tensions were increasing,

⁴⁰ Barbara Taylor, *Eye and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London 1983 p. ix.

⁴¹ For a series of articles concerning this question, albeit from a different perspective, see particularly Eric Hobsbawm et al, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* Verso, London 1981. See also Eric Hobsbawm, *Politics For A Rational Left*, Verso, London 1989.

⁴² For a similar analysis of the forgotten elements in British socialism see Stuart Hall, 'The Battle For Socialist Ideas In The 1980s'. *The Socialist Register 1982* Merlin Press, London 1982 pp. 1-19.

cut across utopian dreams of a world free from those tensions. In the process, Taylor has argued, deep contradictions emerged within Owenite thought itself. Thus the Owenite insistence that women were more naturally socialist than men could easily slide into an acceptance of innate 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities.

Egalitarian principles tugged in one direction while the tightening claims of respectable femininity pulled in another. This tension had been present within feminism from the 1790s on. But within Owenism it was heightened by an internal emphasis on the moral and cultural 'improvement' of working people which often involved a deliberate re-orientation of plebian social life around a feminized ideal. Women's family-centred, nurturing culture came to be seen as a desirable alternative to masculine, work-centred, competitive culture: a development which had important implications for the status of Socialist women.⁴³

In her work, Taylor restores an analysis of gender to a socialist tradition in which 'utopian' desire has, in her view,⁴⁴ become separated from and subordinate to economistic expressions of class struggle. The tensions she identifies between egalitarianism and difference - in the sense of an idealised feminine culture - were symptomatic of the growing subordination of utopian desire, as gender and class priorities became separated in the 1830s and 1840s.

In their work Rowbotham and Weeks have argued that towards the end of the nineteenth century there existed another 'forgotten' period in the history of socialism when feminism, sexual radicalism and socialism were intertwined. The severing of these connections, in their view, occurred partly as a result of the formation of a political party - initially the Independent Labour Party - with the express intention of getting labour men into Parliament; and partly also as a result of the application of 'scientific'

⁴³ Taylor, Eye and the New Jerusalem, pp. 221-222.

⁴⁴ It is a view which is shared by, among others, E.P. Thompson in his work, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary, Pantheon, New York 1976. Postscript. pp. 792-793.

analysis to social issues.⁴⁵ In the process, at a national level at least, there was a discernible shift away from socialist autonomy, in the sense of creating an alternative culture, towards political alliance and women came to be defined increasingly by their role within the family. Once again, like Taylor, they detect an 'increasing tendency among socialists to see sexual change as an outcome of the economic re-organisation of society and to stress the positive role of the family as a defence against wage labour and capitalism'.⁴⁶

It is precisely this tension between gender and class priorities, so central to Taylor and Rowbotham and Weeks' work, that is underplayed in Liddington and Norris's otherwise excellent study of working class radical suffragists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gender antagonism is frequently described between women and men in the socialist movement but it is not analysed. Thus, the Independent Labour Party is described as sympathetic to feminism and yet was 'ambivalent on the question of women's suffrage'.⁴⁷ Similarly, Harry Quelch's implacable opposition to women's suffrage is seen more in terms of his presumed familiarity with London middle-class suffragists rather than in terms of his membership of an organisation - the Social Democratic Federation - which, at its London level at least, often espoused a crude economic determinism.⁴⁸ Liddington and Norris's work falls into the first approach to writing women's history described by Joan Scott, which she delineates as 'her-story'; 'a narrative of women's experience either alongside or entirely

⁴⁵ Sheila Rowbotham & Jeffrey Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, Pluto Press, London 1977. pp. 16-23.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 19.

⁴⁷ Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us. The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Virago, London 1978. p. 125.

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 185-186.

outside conventional historical frameworks'.⁴⁹ It has fundamentally altered our perception of the suffrage movement but it has not challenged conventional historiography. A gendered analysis would have restored this missing dimension to their work by explaining how gender structured women and men's sense of class in this period. Thus, a further task of this thesis will be to examine the complex interaction of gender and class and to reach an understanding of why the goals of feminism and socialism have apparently only coincided at specific historical periods.

The above debates between feminist theorists and feminist historians illustrate how complex the theoretical issues are. Those issues which have been identified as relevant to this thesis are: the tension between arguments for equality and those for difference and how these are related to women's autonomy; the notion that identity itself is gendered and is implicated in all structures of society; that gender explicitly influences class formation; and, finally, that the desire for a new world free from gender and class conflict is an important, albeit minor, tradition within socialism. I have, therefore, devised an interpretive framework which will facilitate understanding of how all these elements interacted in the period 1883-1914

I will argue, firstly, that the tension between arguments for equality and those for difference constitutes the feminist problematic: the unstable, fragile and seemingly contradictory co-existence of assertions of

⁴⁹ J. Scott, 'Women In History II'. pp. 147-8.

difference with those of equality or equivalence.⁵⁰ The dangers in both positions are clear: the former presupposes no commonality between women and men and thereby merely reverses the unequal dichotomy from male valorisation to female valorisation. The second eschews all notion of difference, and can indeed display considerable hostility to this notion, in favour of equality within a system where the normative values are androcentric. But perhaps feminists have been looking for a too simplistic solution to the 'problems' of feminism; an all-embracing theory which is ultimately teleological. This is not to argue for a return to positivism, rather it is to suggest that we should not see essentialism and egalitarianism as two opposing and antagonistic strands of feminism but as elements which are always in a dialectical relationship with each other.

It is only by theorising the strands of feminism in such ways that we can come to understand feminist debates of the period 1883-1914 which simultaneously assert both difference and equality, sometimes within the same speech or passage of writing; and understand, too, that these are not necessarily fixed positions but may change over time. Both positions represent an articulation of the complex and contradictory philosophical and historical inheritance of humanism, liberalism (bourgeois egalitarianism) and socialism. The ascendancy of either or both positions only makes sense historically when considered in relation to other, competing and informing elements within society.

In a similar manner we can also perceive a socialist problematic, which asserts itself in a re-formulation of difference and equality, and which can

⁵⁰ Problematic is understood here in two inter-related ways. In the first sense it is that which constitutes a problem. In the second sense it is the contradiction implicit within a mode of thought or theoretical practice when it seeks to ask some questions by suppressing others. In this case 'difference' is organised on the basis of gender and remains blind to other forms of social organisation, such as class and race. 'Equality', on the other hand, is organised on the basis of a universal humanity which effectively ignores the differences between the classes and the genders. It is, above all, a bourgeois/liberal and androcentric mode of thought.

be seen most sharply in the attitude of various socialist groups to parliamentary politics and to the trade union movement: independence or alliance. Again, the dangers here are clear: independence has the potential to consign socialism to the political wilderness, most particularly when it remains a minority grouping within a liberal/democratic framework. Alternatively, alliance can frequently mean co-option; the adjustment of socialism to a bourgeois (universal) norm. Both problematics share these twin perspectives and it is only by elucidating them that it is possible to see how the feminists and socialists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to transform and transcend them.

However, to present both the feminist and socialist problematics in this way is to reveal only half the picture as it denies the possibility of a third position which embraces both difference and equality. In the case of feminism, this took the form of seeking to enter and change the 'male' public institutions armed with 'woman-centred' values; a position which was held by both non-socialist and socialist feminists alike. In the case of socialism, this took the form of entering bourgeois institutions (most notably Parliament) and those labour organisations perceived as influenced by *laissez-faire* ideology in order to transform them.⁵¹ That neither the feminists nor the socialists, nor indeed a combination of the two, were completely successful in their aims is an indication of the tension between feminism and socialism. The question here is not to judge them by success or failure - to do so would be to underplay the element of struggle involved - but to elucidate the many and varied responses to specific debates.

In the period from 1883-1914 no one organisation or individual held a monopoly on all or even one of these positions: the various strands of both feminism and socialism were intricately bound to each other, to be understood as much through their philosophical similarities as through their

⁵¹ This is not to be confused with the Fabian policy of permeation.

philosophical differences. As such, therefore, this thesis is also the story of women's struggle within a subjectivity,⁵² an expression of consciousness and its social and cultural manifestations, which denoted the male experience as normative. It was to be a fractured and fragmented struggle. It is also the story of the socialist struggle within that same subjectivity which denoted the bourgeois male experience as normative. It too was to be a fractured and fragmented struggle. The fractured nature of these struggles must be seen to lie in the philosophical foundations of feminism and socialism themselves. For their point of origin, the late eighteenth century, coincided with the rise of liberalism, which was predicated upon a series of dichotomies between, pre-eminently, public and private, man and woman, reason and passion. Both feminism and socialism reflected those dichotomies at the same time as they sought to change them. As one historian has written: 'Conceived as antagonistic ways of explaining and dealing with sex hierarchy, the conflicts between separation and social participation, and between the claims of sex on the one hand, and race and class on the other, are themselves expressions of the nineteenth-century conception of two sociosexual spheres.'⁵³

⁵² I am not using the word 'subjectivity' in the sense that it has been taken up by Sally Alexander in her article, 'Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History' op. cit. pp.125-149. She argues that: 'Psychoanalysis offers a reading of sexual difference rooted not in the sexual division of labour (which nevertheless organizes that difference), nor within nature, but through the unconscious and language.' Alexander bases her argument on the work of Jacques Lacan which, although he presents us with the exciting theory of the precarious and never guaranteed process of sexual identity, asserts 'the significance of sexual difference through the presence or absence of the phallus - the primary and privileged sign of sexual difference'. Ibid. p. 132. The difficulty here for feminists must be the privileging of the phallus, whether 'symbolic' or otherwise, as the ultimate referent in sexual identity. I prefer to use the broader definition of subjectivity offered by Luisa Passerini: 'I would wish to include within subjectivity the whole range of cultural and psychological activities and expressions of consciousness - individual and collective - which can be embodied in language and behaviour.' Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Working Class Attitudes to Fascism', in Paul Thompson, ed., Our Common History. The Transformation of Europe Pluto Press, London 1982. p. 54.

⁵³ Joan Kelly, 'The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory'. p. 263.

In the light of the preceding discussion, the picture presented of feminists and socialists cannot be homogeneous. The feminist and socialist problematics of difference and equality, and independence and alliance represent the diversity of debates conducted within and between the two modes of thought. Neither can feminists and socialists be denied agency for the fact of their existence indicated a rejection of contemporary modes of thought and organisation. But human agency does not operate in a vacuum. As Marx wrote:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.⁵⁴

Marx's formulation, above all, stresses history as a dialectical process; not a progressive march towards a higher, more enlightened state of being, but a struggle for human liberation conducted not solely within material processes but also within consciousness itself. Similarly, in her work on Fascism, Luisa Passerini has argued:

I believe that there must be, at the level of subjectivity, a coexistence of coercion and freedom, of inheritance and critique. A new form of consciousness can only establish itself through an act of critique, of detachment, of opposition to the existing ideas and attitudes. Yet it could not exist without them...[C]onsciousness is a problematic potentiality, never guaranteed, yet nevertheless possible. Here is the clue to the ambivalence of 'needs', which always combine both a reference to the full potential in human nature and, on the other hand, a partial acceptance of the existing order which denies their realisation.⁵⁵

It is a further aim of this thesis to uncover just that 'problematic potentiality' of consciousness amongst feminists and socialists of the late

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Progress Publishers, Moscow 1977. p. 10.

⁵⁵ L. Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Working Class Attitudes to Fascism'. p. 75.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as an explanation not only of the differences between feminism and socialism but also of the differences within them.

Any discussion of consciousness must necessarily revolve around ideology. For many historians, the debate over ideology has resolved itself into a debate over structure versus agency, or as Gareth Stedman Jones framed it, class expression versus social control.⁵⁶ In this thesis I shall be using the concept in its Gramscian sense. It is to be 'analysed historically, in the terms of the philosophy of praxis, as a superstructure'. It is also the cement which unites and binds together the social bloc. Ideology, therefore, cannot be reduced to a simple formulation of a system of ideas, although clearly it contains elements of this, but has to be seen as a complex material force and a lived relation. For Gramsci, ideology was informed by two critical elements; hegemony and common sense. For the historian, Gramsci's concept of ideology is especially fruitful because it eschews a determinist application and acceptance of bourgeois structures and ideology on the part of the working class in favour of notions of agency and struggle. In other words, hegemony is not something that is imposed, from above, upon the working class, it has to accord with the common sense of that class.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ This debate erupted in print with E.P. Thompson's stinging attack upon the French philosopher Louis Althusser. See E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays. Merlin Press, London 1978. pp. 193-397. It has continued in the form of a debate between Thompson and Richard Johnson. See Raphael Samuel, ed., People's History and Socialist Theory. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1981. pp. 375-408. For Stedman Jones' contribution to the debate see the essay 'Class Expression Versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent Trends in the Social History of 'Leisure''. in his work Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983. pp. 76-89.

⁵⁷ Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell, eds., Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. (1971) Lawrence & Wishart, London 1986. pp. 376 & 328 and the chapters 'State and Civil Society' and 'The Philosophy of Praxis'.

This thesis, then, proposes a new interpretation of socialism and feminism in this period. In the first place, it posits that there was a relationship between feminism and socialism – but it neither pretends that this relationship was successful in the sense of either a complete acceptance of feminist aims by socialists or the reverse, nor does it purport to present a total picture of that relationship in terms of the minutiae of their collective activities, in the sense of an exhaustive history. Rather, the intention of this work is to show, through an examination of both individual and collective feminist and socialist statements, how the different elements within feminism and socialism developed by linking them up with their ideological inheritance, and to suggest how each element both hindered and assisted feminists and socialists in the attainment of their goals. I shall endeavour at the same time to place these within their own historical context in order to elucidate the many competing pressures and choices that exerted themselves and how these pressures too changed over time. Some of the elements may appear reactionary, others revolutionary at different times. But it is the argument of this thesis that no one element was either wholly reactionary or wholly revolutionary. Thus I will not be judging the actions and statements of feminists and socialists by some ideal revolutionary yardstick only to find them lacking, the victims of false consciousness as Tom Nairn, for example, has done.⁵⁸

From a different, though no less critical perspective than that of Nairn's, the experience of ten years of Conservative rule and the apparent failure of Labour to effectively challenge that rule has led to a re-assessment of the labour movement, one which opposes the notion that the Labour Party and the trade union movement reflect the totality of working class

⁵⁸ See Tom Nairn, 'The English Working Class', in Robin Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science. Readings in Critical Social Theory. Fontana, London 1972. pp. 187-206. For a vigorous challenge to Nairn's position see E.P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', in E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays pp. 35-91.

experience.⁵⁹ Stephen Yeo, for example, in his article on socialism in England between 1883 and 1896 has challenged Henry Pelling's interpretation of this period as a transitional phase leading to the founding of a mature political party.⁶⁰ Yeo argues instead that the dreams people had for a new society were actively destroyed or deformed by a number of factors including, among others, the development of a party machine, the adoption of socialist ideology by social engineers and a distorted reflection of socialism in social welfare legislation.⁶¹ Similarly, Stuart Hall has argued against the teleological notion that socialism is the inevitable outcome of working-class experience expressed through the formal apparatus of the Labour Party and the trade union movement; that, in fact, the attainment of socialism involves struggle, particularly at an ideological level.⁶²

Secondly, by definition then this thesis represents a challenge to the histories of socialism which have either 'forgotten' the role women played in the development of the many socialist groups, confined their activity to a few brief pages, lost amongst the greater detail accorded to men, or, as Yeo argues, have misinterpreted the early years of the socialist revival as immature or anomalous.⁶³ The question is not one of 'adding' women to the

⁵⁹ See, for example, James Hinton, Labour and Socialism. A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974, Wheatsheaf, Brighton 1983, p. ix.

⁶⁰ Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', History Workshop Journal, Issue 4, Autumn 1977, pp. 30-31. Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1965, Chapter VII.

⁶¹ S. Yeo, 'A New Life', pp. 31-32.

⁶² Hall, *op. cit.* pp. 1-5.

⁶³ The histories of British socialism are too numerous to mention. But see, for example: Pelling, *op. cit.*; G.D.H.Cole, A History of the Labour Party From 1914 Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1948; Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1974; A.L.Morton & George Tate, The British Labour Movement 1770-1920. A History, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1956.

histories mentioned above but of re-interpreting those texts from a feminist perspective; that is, interrogating the same evidence presented in these texts with feminist questions using gender as the primary analytical tool.

Finally, I take issue also with many of the histories of feminism of this period, most of which have seen feminism as co-terminous with the struggle for women's suffrage and have, moreover, until recently, conceived that struggle in the narrowest sense by concentrating particularly on the activities of the Pankhurst family and their organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union.⁶⁴ A number of recent works have now appeared, with which I shall be engaging in the following chapters, which challenge our stereotypical views of the women's movement of this period. Philippa Levine's work, Victorian Feminism 1850-1900, argues strongly that the multi-faceted attack by Victorian women activists in the areas of education, employment and marriage represented far more than a set of discrete campaigns for equality by a few disgruntled middle-class liberals: 'The most obvious way in which the feminist distinctiveness of the women's movement in this period exhibits itself is in the conscious woman-centredness of its interests'.⁶⁵ This woman-centredness, she argues, cannot be slotted neatly into party political categories because, although it exhibited the class and ideological values of the women involved, it was at the same time a conscious re-definition of those values and of politics

⁶⁴ Again, there are many histories of the fight for women's suffrage. Most of those written which concentrate on the Pankhursts have been the work of male historians. See for example: Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-1914. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1974; David Mitchell, The Fighting Pankhursts Jonathan Cape, London 1967; David Mitchell, Queen Christabel. McDonald & Jane, London 1977; and George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England Paladin, London 1970. A recent work which looks specifically at feminist ideas is Les Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty. Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918 Heinemann, London 1984.

⁶⁵ Philippa Levine, Victorian Feminism 1850-1900 Hutchinson, London 1987. p. 18.

themselves.⁶⁶ Similarly, Sandra Holton's work takes up this theme of woman-centredness to show that a cross-class element in the suffrage movement, the democratic suffragists, were a significant factor in the rise of the Labour Party, and concomitant decline of the Liberal Party, as the party of progress. In the process, a seemingly paradoxical event whereby the apparently Liberal National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies established an election fighting fund for the Labour Party is explained.⁶⁷ The notion of woman-centredness may provide one of the keys to understanding the articulation of gender by women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, in this thesis I shall be taking issue with Levine's assertion that it is relevant to all the campaigns conducted by women. In particular, I shall argue that in the case of women's trade unionism claims of 'sisterhood' were articulated by middle-class women who possessed only a limited understanding of the actual conditions of life for working-class women. Indeed, one of the primary aims of this thesis is to demonstrate that gender was intersected by class, and class was intersected by gender.

The amount of material of relevance to this thesis, in the form of both primary and secondary sources, is vast - more than could possibly be incorporated. Therefore, I do not pretend that this is a comprehensive history of feminism and socialism between 1883 and 1914; rather, it is concerned with the relationship between feminism and socialism, particularly from a feminist perspective. To discover the parameters of that relationship I have necessarily selected those debates and issues which reveal its complexity. Thus, for example, in Chapter Four, which looks at women's trade unionism, I concentrate on the protective legislation debate

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁶⁷ Sandra Stanley Holton, Feminism and Democracy. Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986. See especially the Introduction and Chapters one and four.

insofar as this particular debate clarifies the disparate strands of feminism and socialism and enables us to see the development and interconnections both within and between the two.

I have chosen to divide my work according to those areas where feminists and socialists were most visible - the trade union movement and the political labour movement - which might appear to be replicating the traditional emphasis in historical work upon the public sphere alone. But by their very actions both feminists and socialists were demanding that their concerns be placed upon the political agenda. They had already, therefore, crossed the ideological divide between public and private spheres. Moreover, as Jane Rendell has stated: 'it is impossible to recover the language which women used, and the meaning of their politics, unless we consider that separate viewpoint [of women's domestic lives]'.⁶⁸ Indeed, it can be argued that the demand for entry into the 'public' sphere represented a moment when a feminist and socialist consciousness appeared in stark relief against this background of ideological division.

This is not a traditional empirically-based thesis. The reasons for this are two-fold and closely related. Firstly, considerable research has already been undertaken in this area. Although this research has covered both feminism and socialism, the two movements have generally been treated as discrete: thus histories of socialism have rarely mentioned feminism and histories of feminism, with few exceptions such as the work of Liddington and Norris, Rowbotham and Weeks, and Barbara Taylor, have rarely mentioned socialism. Yet, clearly there was a relationship between the two - feminist voices are frequently heard at the same time as radical voices are raised. It was no historical accident that Mary Wollstonecraft's famous tract appeared in 1792 when discussion about the 'rights of man' abounded. Such links have continued down to the present-day with the rise of 'second

⁶⁸ J. Rendell, Equal or Different, p. 4.

wave' feminism and its initially close relationship to the New Left and the protest movements of the 1960s. Secondly, therefore, we need to understand why this occurs and, more importantly, why feminist concerns have only rarely been central to socialism, such as in the Owenite movement and, it will be argued, during the early years of the socialist revival in England from the 1880s. We need to understand particularly what it is about feminist and socialist ideologies which makes them so hard to reconcile, except in some historical contexts. I believe this needs to be done at both a theoretical and an historical level.

Any work of interpretation risks the problem of distorting the material to fit the theory, in other words, of imposing the theory upon the evidence. The theory in this thesis evolved after consideration of the evidence. I have also attempted to build upon the work of previous historians in order to understand this complex relationship between feminism and socialism. Indeed, this work would not have been possible without them. I show that historical understanding cannot be derived solely from empirical evidence. I have tried to mitigate the problem of theoretical history - that the actors can be lost amidst the argument - as much as possible by situating debates within their historical contexts. Theoretical history often suffers from rigidity; the structures affecting people's lives can receive undue attention at the expense of an understanding of agency through resistance. People do not act according to the prescripts of theory, although they do act according to ideas even when these are framed in the diluted and unacknowledged sense of commonsense. By building upon Luisa Passerini's notion of consciousness as 'a problematic potentiality' and by utilising Gramsci's concept of ideology I have endeavoured to avoid such theoretical reductionism. With these difficulties in mind, I believe that a theoretical overview of the period 1883-1914 can enhance our understanding of feminism and socialism and it is in this area that the originality of this thesis lies.

The first chapter examines in detail the philosophical and political inheritance of feminism and socialism. Starting with Mary Wollstonecraft's key text, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, written in 1792, it demonstrates that the meaning of what it is to be a woman had been fiercely contested in the almost one hundred years leading up to the period covered by this thesis. It describes in particular the difficulties inherent within philosophies which privileged individual will and responsibility - voluntarism - when taken as the foundation for feminism and socialism. In the case of John Stuart Mill, it is argued, the combination of liberalism and feminism ultimately left him with no option but to seek recourse in essentialist arguments. It points out that the philosophical links between Wollstonecraft and Mill, which some commentators have seen as the starting point for equal rights feminism,⁶⁹ have been greatly over-estimated. Whilst Wollstonecraft challenged the contemporary ideology of woman, pointing out that it was a social prescription of what it was to be a woman rather than a biological description, Mill initially adhered to this view but failed to make this distinction in the last resort.

A further influence upon the later feminists and socialists was that of evangelicalism. Formulated as a counter-offensive to the spread of English Jacobinism and the corruption of the aristocracy, it proclaimed the natural division between women and men as ordained by God. It was, above all, a moral campaign which stressed women's natural moral goodness uncontaminated by contact with the public world. There were, as a result, two inter-related responses to this moral campaign. In the first place, the emphasis upon the moral influence of women led to an expansion of their involvement in philanthropic and 'rescue' work. This, in its turn, led to a

⁶⁹ See, for example, Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism. A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement, Martin Robertson, Oxford 1981. pp. 28-29. The author states that Mill, along with Wollstonecraft, share a 'denial of all innate qualities'. p. 28.

form of feminism, influenced by the experiences encountered during such work, which gradually perceived all women as victims of male behaviour regardless of their class backgrounds and simultaneously argued that women's moral guidance was urgently needed within the more formal public arena.

The effect of evangelicalism upon socialism was both complex and contradictory. By the middle years of the nineteenth century the religious language of evangelicalism had become secularised and framed part of the 'common sense' of certain key sections of the working class. Whilst the moral qualities attributed to women by the Evangelicals were perceived by some socialists as those which were desirable for all people in the quest for liberation, the gendered perspective which the Evangelicals brought to all forms of social activity also produced a countervailing tendency which stressed the essentialism of both femininity and masculinity. These elements together comprised the complex ideological inheritance of feminism and socialism and, to a large extent, they set the parameters for the debate concerning the relationship between the two from 1883 to 1914.

Chapters Two and Three examine the development of socialist feminism from 1883 to 1900. Chapter Two concentrates on the form of socialism which re-emerged in Britain in the 1880s through a detailed examination of the work of William Morris and Edward Carpenter, particularly in the light of their importance for feminism. As a result of their emphasis upon a changed consciousness - to sexual relations, work, art, indeed, to all facets of social life - Morris and Carpenter's work struck chords within women and men from both the middle and the working classes, chords which had their roots both in the history of feminism and socialism over the previous century and in the political, social and economic conditions of the 1880s. The chapter also examines this period as one where one half of the socialist problematic, that of independence, was in the ascendancy.

Chapter Three continues the story to 1900 from the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, but looks at the other half of the socialist problematic; alliance. Critical here for the future of both feminism and socialism in Britain was the development of the 'new unionism' and its relations with the ILP and the Trades Union Congress.

Chapters Four, Five and Six are concerned with the development of autonomous and quasi-autonomous women's organisations from 1900 to 1914, although in some cases information prior to and beyond these dates will be included. These chapters look respectively at women's trade unionism, the suffrage movement and women's political groups. In a sense they are each concerned with both halves of the feminist problematic. The aim of all three of these chapters is to show the development of feminism - the differences within and between each organisation over particular debates and their relationship to differences within and between their largely all-male counterparts. By this means I will argue that the attainment of a specific feminist or socialist or socialist feminist consciousness was not a 'given' to be determined either by class or by gender. Rather, such consciousnesses were determined more by a complex inter-weaving of political, social and economic factors.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF FEMINISM AND SOCIALISM

Some recent commentators have referred to the years from 1880 to 1930 when socialism re-emerged in England as a period of crisis during which the modern state was in the making - not in the sense of a gentle evolutionary transition from one form of social organisation to another but a rupture with pre-existing modes of organisation and thought.¹ It has been stated, for example, that the emergence of the Labour Party must be seen not as the natural successor to Liberalism but as representing a specific break with the liberal philosophical tradition occurring within the context of an ideological shift towards collectivism.² Whether it is possible to argue, as Mary Langan, Bill Schwarz and their contributors have done in the book Crises in the British State 1880-1930, that Britain was in a state of continuous crisis for fifty years is debatable. Rather, it would be more appropriate to argue that Britain was experiencing a series of important political, social and economic changes some of which, such as the industrial unrest of 1909-1913, represented specific points of crisis. Nevertheless, the revival of socialism did occur in a climate of discontent and economic distress. The unemployment returns of trade unions showed sharp rises for

¹ See, for example, Stuart Hall & Bill Schwarz, 'State and Society, 1880-1930', in Mary Langan & Bill Schwarz, eds., Crises in the British State 1880-1930 Hutchinson, London 1985. p. 9

² Ibid. The notion of crisis in this text is derived from a direct engagement with the thesis put forward by George Dangerfield in his work The Strange Death Of Liberal England (1935) Granada, London 1972 in which he argued that the First World War did not represent a watershed for Liberalism, but merely hastened a process of disintegration which was already evident in the pre-war years. The ideas put forward here by Hall and Schwarz run directly counter to the thesis presented by Ross McKibbin in his work The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 Clarendon Press, Oxford 1974.

1878 and 1879, and again for the period 1884-1887.³ At the same time, however, because prices also fell during these years those who remained in full employment were materially better off.⁴

Yet, notwithstanding this apparent paradox of distress and material betterment, a number of contemporary observers did perceive the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a time of crisis. According to J. A. Hobson, a major Liberal theorist, the period specifically represented a crisis of Liberalism: 'For over a quarter of a century Liberalism has wandered in this valley of indecision, halting, weak, vacillating, divided, and concessive...The real crisis of Liberalism lies...in the intellectual and moral ability to accept and execute a positive progressive policy which involves a new conception of the functions of the State'.⁵ To Beatrice Webb, on the other hand, the crisis amounted to a 'consciousness of sin...that the industrial organisation, which had yielded rent, interest and profits on a stupendous scale, had failed to provide a decent livelihood and tolerable conditions for a majority of the inhabitants of Great Britain'.⁶ However this sense of crisis was perceived, it sparked off a torrent of articles and surveys by journalists and social investigators to match those produced in

³ B. R. Mitchell & P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1971. p. 64. These figures represent trade union returns only. Given that only about 10% of adult males were unionists it is likely that the actual figures were higher than those cited here. See E. H. Hunt, British Labour History 1815-1914 Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, London 1981. p. 287.

⁴ See Eric Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968. p. 162.

⁵ J. A. Hobson, The Crisis of Liberalism: New Issues of Democracy, P. S. King & Son, London 1909. pp. viii & xi.

⁶ Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship. Vol.1. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1938. p. 206. But see Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London. A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1971. p. 285 who argues that historians have been misled by Webb's statement and that it was fear not guilt which prompted investigation into poverty.

the 1830s and 1840s.⁷ The crisis also had an impact upon historiography: a whole generation of historians, including Arnold Toynbee, Beatrice and Sidney Webb and Barbara and John Hammond, declared the origins of their contemporary conditions to lie with the industrial revolution and thus became the first major proponents of the immiseration thesis of industrialisation.⁸

If the late nineteenth century was, in the eyes of contemporary intellectuals, a period of crisis, it must also be viewed as a time of intense struggle which penetrated far beneath the surface of institutional reforms to engage with both language and consciousness. Situated at the very centre of this struggle were the socialists and feminists for they were involved in a critical contest for the hearts and minds of the population. The aim of this chapter is three-fold. First, in order to comprehend the parameters of this contest, it is necessary to explore the ideological roots of socialism and feminism in an endeavour to elucidate the complexity of their historical inheritance and the extent to which they both altered, and were altered by, the conditions of the late nineteenth century. Secondly, by so doing, it will become apparent that to talk of socialism and feminism in the singular is misleading and, ultimately, mystifying for neither socialism nor feminism were unitary ideologies during this period. Understanding the differences

⁷ See for example, Andrew Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London. An Enquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor (1883) and the two surveys conducted by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree of London and York published from 1889 to 1901.

⁸ David Cannadine, 'The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution 1880-1980'. Past and Present . No. 103 1984. pp. 133-139. See also John Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750-1850 Longman, London 1986. pp. 28-29. For a spirited attack upon the 'revisionist' economic historians and sociologists such as W.W. Rostow, T.S. Ashton and N.J. Smelser see E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968. pp. 213-216. Thompson argues here that concentration upon the economic process and whether it resulted in an improvement in the standard of living is meaningless without a similar concentration upon the political, cultural and social effects of industrialisation. This has, in turn, provoked a critique of Thompson as a 'culturalist'. See Richard Johnson, 'Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and Socialist-Humanist History'. History Workshop Journal. Issue 6. Autumn 1978. pp. 79-100.

between them, as well as the similarities, is essential to an understanding of the debates examined in the further chapters. Finally, it is concerned more precisely with how the socialists and feminists sought to change the dominant ideologies of woman; the extent to which they either accepted or rejected contemporary depictions of women.

In her work, Faces of Feminism, Olive Banks has identified three distinct feminist traditions with distinct origins: the Enlightenment; Evangelical Christianity; and socialist feminism. The first tradition, she argues, can be traced through the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill leading to an equal rights feminism. The second tradition occurred as a result of the religious revivals of the late eighteenth century and expressed itself in arguments for the moral superiority of women leading to radical feminism. The third tradition's roots are found in the Saint-Simonian movement in France which attacked the family and conventional sexual morality between women and men leading to both a later Marxist emphasis upon socialised child care and also to certain elements within radical feminism.⁹ The advantages of this approach lie in its refusal to see feminism as a unitary ideology. There are, however, a number of problems with Banks' typology which become evident when one examines Mary Wollstonecraft's key feminist text, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which was first published in 1792.

The thrust of Wollstonecraft's argument in this text was to expose the fundamental irrationality of contemporary debates about woman. The essence of this irrationality, she argued, lay within the nature of the debates themselves, for they were structured in such a way as to make them self-fulfilling. Thus, because women of the middle and upper classes exhibited puerile and subservient characteristics in relation to men, it was

⁹ Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism. A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement. Martin Robertson, Oxford 1981. pp. 7-8.

argued that women by nature must therefore be puerile and subservient. Wollstonecraft did not disagree with these descriptions of female behaviour, indeed she herself elaborated upon them, but she did disagree with the conclusions drawn from them. As she wrote: '*Men* have submitted to superior strength to enjoy with impunity the pleasure of the moment; *women* have only done the same, and therefore till it is proved that the courtier, who servilely resigns the birthright of a man, is not a moral agent, it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated.'¹⁰

Wollstonecraft went on to argue that far from demonstrating the innate inferiority of women, contemporary debates merely constituted a description of the influence of environmental factors upon human behaviour, the most important of which was that of education, which in this context meant socialisation as well as formal education. Until women and men received an identical education no conclusion could be drawn concerning the relative inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes. But, and this is where Wollstonecraft was at her most radical, even given that equal educational opportunity, it would still be impossible to arrive at a just conclusion because 'it may then fairly be inferred, that, till society be differently constituted, much cannot be expected from education'.¹¹ The result of her arguments, as Barbara Taylor has said, was to push 'the demand for female emancipation directly into the mainstream of British political life',¹² for Wollstonecraft was the first theorist to explicitly connect the liberation of women with the need for a reconstructed society.

¹⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) Penguin, Harmondsworth 1983 p.122. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.102.

¹² Barbara Taylor, Eye and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, Virago, London 1983. p.1.

Wollstonecraft's text has been seen by some commentators as the foundation stone of bourgeois liberal feminism;¹³ an observation which has been primarily generated by the fact that she addressed her work specifically to middle-class women.¹⁴ Whilst it is true that her argument concerned the rights of women to those educational, political and professional opportunities which her contemporary Thomas Paine had asserted for middle-class men, nevertheless, her denunciation of the aristocratic system of patronage and privilege brought her to a recognition of the parallels between the position of women and that of the working class.

'Educate women like men,' says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power they will have over us.' This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves. In the same strain have I heard men argue against instructing the poor; for many are the forms that aristocracy assumes. 'Teach them to read and write,' say they, 'and you take them out of the station assigned them by nature.'¹⁵

If Wollstonecraft's work can be said overall to be a classic statement of liberal philosophy, the above statement, coupled with the connection she made between the liberation of women and the necessity for radical social change, suggests that her work must also be seen as an important text for the origins of the links between feminism and socialism.

Yet Wollstonecraft's liberationist message to women was, as Cora Kaplan has argued, constrained by her acceptance of a fundamental dichotomy between reason and passion, as a result of her attempts to include women within the canons of the Enlightenment debate established by, among others,

¹³ See, for example, Miriam Kramnick, Introduction to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, pp. 7 & 16.

¹⁴ M. Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman p. 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.154.

Rousseau.¹⁶ Rousseau's denial of women's right to participate equally within civil society was based upon his view of women as determined by their sexuality and, more exactly, their reproductive functions.¹⁷ Whilst he argued that passion was accorded to both sexes alike, in men it was restrained by reason, in women by modesty.¹⁸ So for women to fulfil the feminine ideal constructed by Rousseau they were by definition unfitted for the demands of public life. Indeed, it was only by exclusion from this world that women could exercise control over their passions. But the implications of this androcentric account of female subjectivity were not fully acknowledged by Wollstonecraft. As Cora Kaplan has written: 'By defending women against Rousseau's denial of their reason, Wollstonecraft unwittingly assents to his negative, eroticized sketch of their emotional lives.'¹⁹ In other words, Wollstonecraft's acceptance of the predominance of reason over passion was to promote women's equal rational status with men at the expense of acknowledging women's sexuality or sensuality. Wollstonecraft's rejection of sensuality and passion in her plea for the recognition of reason and, therefore also, equality for women bequeathed to feminism a legacy of contradiction which had implications for those socialists and feminists of the late nineteenth century who sought to create a reconstructed society by means of changing individual consciousness as well as by means of social, political and economic reforms.

The arguments put forward by Barbara Taylor and Cora Kaplan would appear to bring into question Banks' typology of nineteenth-century

¹⁶ Cora Kaplan, 'Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism', in Gayle Greene & Coppélia Kahn, eds., Making A Difference. Feminist Literary Criticism, Methuen, London 1985. pp. 155-158.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of Rousseau's work see Susan Moller Okin, Women In Western Political Thought, Virago, London 1980. pp. 99-194.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 117.

¹⁹ C. Kaplan, 'Pandora's Box'. p. 158.

feminism as comprised of three distinct strands - Enlightenment, Evangelical and socialist feminism. All three elements are clearly discernible within Wollstonecraft's work through her concentration upon reason, her assertion that education would control women's more sensual nature and would fit them for the duties of motherhood²⁰ and the connections she made between the position of women and that of the working class. This is not to deny the usefulness of the delineation of these three strands; rather, it is to argue that whilst their distinction serves an analytical purpose - and will be used as such in this thesis - it is perhaps more appropriate to say that they represented points of tension within feminism as women sought to carve out a political and social space for themselves.

Whilst the purpose of Wollstonecraft's treatise had been to assert the necessity for a democratic egalitarian revolution which included the rights of women, a contemporaneous movement of middle-class intellectuals²¹ also concerned with the reform of society, sought, on the other hand, a moral and ethical basis for the formal exclusion of women from participation in civil society in an attempt to prevent that revolution. In her pioneering study of the Evangelicals, Catherine Hall has argued that in order to effect their own form of revolution of the morals and manners of society they made women the centre of that moral reformation, arguing in a somewhat circular manner that women's moral superiority rested upon a strict separation of spheres which was ultimately ordained by God.²² The maintenance of this new moral order was to be achieved through a personal

²⁰ For an elaboration of this point see Jane Rendell, The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and The United States 1780-1860, Macmillan, London 1985. p. 62.

²¹ They included Hannah More, William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton and were more commonly known as the Clapham Sect.

²² Catherine Hall, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology' in Sandra Burman, ed., Fit Work For Women, Croom Helm. London & Canberra 1979 pp.15-32.

struggle between the individual and God. This recourse to a higher authority pre-empted debates concerning its validity whilst at the same time it later provided women with the rationale for engaging in charity and rescue work. Thus, whilst Wollstonecraft had sought to demonstrate that the inferior position of women within society rested upon the conflation of custom with nature, the Evangelicals reinforced and built upon that conflation. This led them to the inherently contradictory conclusion that women were morally superior to men but naturally inferior. Nevertheless, like Wollstonecraft, they asserted a division between reason and passion, arguing that only through a rigorous moral education and the adoption of separate spheres could women maintain their purity and innocence.²³ By the middle years of the century, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have argued in their recent work on the English middle class, the religious language of sexual difference used by the Evangelicals had passed into secular usage and thereby entered the 'common sense' of the middle class.²⁴

The immediate political context for Wollstonecraft's and the Evangelicals' critique of society was the example of the American and French revolutions and, as such, must be seen as both political and pragmatic responses to those events. They both understood the origins of these revolutions to lie in the degeneration of the aristocracy. Where they differed, however, was in the manner in which they interpreted that degeneration. Whereas Wollstonecraft perceived the destruction of the aristocracy as necessary for a democratic revolution,²⁵ the Evangelicals made the reconstruction of the aristocracy a prerequisite for a stable

²³ Ibid. pp. 21-29.

²⁴ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850. Hutchinson, London 1987. p. 149.

²⁵ M. Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman pp. 92-93.

society.²⁶ With the threat of a democratic revolution coming both from abroad and at home the Evangelicals made the prevention of such a revolution contingent upon the reform of the family. In this manner, the family became an active moral force within society, with the role of women pivotal within it.

The Evangelicals sought to rationalise the rapid social, political and economic changes which were occurring in England at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Like the feminists and socialists of the late nineteenth century, they were trying to re-model a society in a state of change. Contrary to what used to be the received wisdom, the industrial revolution did not result primarily in the proliferation of machine-driven factories. Instead, recent scholarship has demonstrated that it resulted in the intensification of an already existing labour process which became increasingly directly subject to the vagaries of market relations.²⁷ For much of the nineteenth century and, in some industries, beyond that period, machinery did not act as a substitute for manual labour. Instead, where machinery was adopted it was frequently accompanied by innumerable manual tasks which formed an essential part of the production process. Raphael Samuel has put forward a number of reasons as to why machinery did not achieve predominance in this process. Firstly, labour was cheap and abundant, which encouraged capitalists to engage in capital-saving rather than labour-saving investment. Secondly, increased productivity could be achieved either by introducing better tools, by more intensive exploitation of the labour force, or through the introduction of cheaper, labour-saving materials. Thirdly, an increased

²⁶ C. Hall, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology', p. 18.

²⁷ See Richard Price, Labour in British Society, Croom Helm, London 1986. pp. 18-21; John Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750-1850 Longman, London 1986. pp. 3-4; E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968. pp. 210-211; & Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England Harvester, Brighton 1980. p. xiv.

division of labour could achieve a rise in productivity without the need for machinery. Fourthly, the machinery itself often failed to perform to expectations or could not achieve the same precision as hand work. Fifthly, much machinery still required skilled labour to control it. And, finally, the costs involved in installing and running machinery were often daunting even for quite large firms.²⁸

One effect of this continuation of old methods accompanied by greater exploitation of the workforce was a disruption in the social relations of production. Because of this, Richard Price has argued that: 'Paternal rhetoric and ideology were invigorated by industrialization because it created the necessity and the opportunity to re-create (as Cobbett put it) those "chains of connection between rich and poor" that were endangered by economic progress.'²⁹ It is within this context of paternalism and the necessity for work discipline that the Evangelicals sought to re-define society in terms of an essential division of labour between women and men.³⁰ The home came to be seen as a haven from the public world where harsh competition and numberless vices proliferated. As Catherine Hall, comparing the Evangelicals with an earlier generation of conservative moralists, has written:

The Puritans and the Evangelicals shared a need to build a protected space in a hostile world, from which the great campaign of evangelisation could be securely launched. The home was an area which

²⁸ Raphael Samuel, 'The Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in mid-Victorian Britain', History Workshop Journal, Issue 3 Spring 1977, pp. 6-72. See especially pp. 47-56.

²⁹ Richard Price, 'Structures of Subordination in Nineteenth-Century British Industry', in P. Thane, G. Crossick & R. Floud, eds., The Power of the Past. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, p. 124.

³⁰ The question of paternalism and the sexual division of labour are discussed below in Chapters Three and Four.

could be controlled and which was relatively independent of what went on outside. The home did provide a haven.³¹

Such a gendered ideology³² was highly contradictory thereby enabling later feminists the opportunity to seek a voice in the public world.³³ The most important contradiction lay in the emphasis the Evangelicals placed upon the moral superiority yet actual inferiority of women. Feminists in the second half of the century built upon this contradiction by arguing that if women were the possessors of moral virtue and if, too, the public world was immoral, then their participation was not only justified but vital for the future of the nation.³⁴ Later on, in the early years of the twentieth century, feminists were to take this argument even further by declaring that the encroachment of the state into those areas where women were intimately concerned, such as the welfare and education of children, made their involvement a moral imperative.³⁵

³¹ C. Hall, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology', p.29.

³² This is commonly known as the bourgeois domestic ideology. I prefer to use the term 'gendered ideology' as it better conveys the extent to which it included all facets of social activity and, moreover, affected all social classes.

³³ Thus the philanthropists Louisa Twining and Mary Carpenter became radicalised by their involvement in workhouses and prisons, challenging both the structures and the ethos of these male-dominated institutions. See Ray Strachey, The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928). Virago. London 1978. pp. 80-83.

³⁴ See, for example, Mary M. Dilke: 'We cannot afford as a nation to allow such a potent moral influence as that of women to lie fallow. It is very well to call it a reserve force, but a reserve force that is never to be put into action is of small practical value. We think the time has come when that moral influence must be both organised and put in action.' 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Reply. II. The Nineteenth Century, No. 149. July 1889. pp. 101-102.

³⁵ For example, in 1914 the Executive Committee of the Women's Labour League claimed: 'It is to the women workers of the world, to the wives and the mothers, to those who have the care of the children of to-day that we must look to tend the flame of freedom, justice and equality on the hearth of the home. For never until that spirit inspires the upbringing of the race, until women take a full share in national life, are citizens as well as wives and mothers, will the unity of the workers be achieved, true democracy attained and life's full possibilities opened to the happy-eyed children of the future.' Report of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League London 1914. p. 32. WLL 2.

Both Wollstonecraft's work and that of the Evangelicals represented two very different, yet inter-related responses to the changes occurring in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England. Where Wollstonecraft had tentatively drawn the links between the position of women and that of the newly politically aware bourgeoisie to posit a radically different society, the Evangelicals, contrarily, also made those connections but for an entirely different purpose, for they desired 'to detach sexual egalitarianism [and therefore also social revolution] from the canons of middle-class respectability'.³⁶ But in so doing, Barbara Taylor has argued:

This had a decisive effect on the ideological formation of Socialist feminist politics. By identifying women's rights with sexual libertarianism, infidelism and social revolution, the new conservatives actually helped to fuse these aspects of radical thought together in the minds of their feminist opponents. By insisting that sexual equality would inevitably lead to 'the overthrow of all existing social institutions', including the church, marriage and family life, they assisted in the creation of a brand of feminism which had precisely those goals. And by equating the protest of women with the 'levelling' aspirations of the radical working class, they helped to forge that alliance between sex and class goals which emerged, a quarter-century later, in the Owenite movement.³⁷

If Wollstonecraft's text and the Evangelical association of it with sexual radicalism and working-class protest led to a feminist and socialist

³⁶ B. Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem p.15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

alliance in the Owenite movement,³⁸ Taylor has also argued that these same ideas – those of Wollstonecraft and the Evangelicals – created acute tensions within the movement: 'Minimizing distinctions between the sexes gave coherence to demands for egalitarian treatment, but at the expense of ignoring those aspects of women's existence which simply could not be lived in the male mode. But to admit the particularity of women's lives and needs appeared to undercut the egalitarian argument.'³⁹ Some sections of the Owenite movement did, however, attempt to transcend these dilemmas by 'postulating the simultaneous transformation of *both* sexes – the critique of socially-defined femininity must become a critique of masculinity as well'.⁴⁰

Taylor has shown how the Owenites, like Wollstonecraft before them, concentrated their ideas upon the area of the family and the role of women within it.⁴¹ They, too, were to stress morality as the essential ingredient for harmony between the sexes and the classes.⁴² This grand project, which was ultimately aimed at the simultaneous destruction of both gender and

³⁸ The history of the Owenite movement was both uneven and complex. What follows must, of necessity, be a cursory examination of some of the main elements of that movement. Briefly, the history of the movement may be divided into three sections: the years from 1829-1832 saw the establishment of co-operative ventures in manufacturing and trading; 1833-34 were the years of trade union struggle which culminated in the establishment and demise of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union; and from the mid-1830s to the end of the 1840s the Owenites engaged in an intensive propaganda campaign under the auspices of the Association of All Classes of All Nations. See Barbara Taylor, 'The men are as bad as their masters...': Socialism, Feminism and Sexual Antagonism in the London Tailoring Trade in the 1830s', in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan & Judith R. Walkowitz, eds., Sex and Class in Women's History. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London 1983. pp.187-220.

³⁹ B. Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem, p. 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ As early as 1825 two Owenite propagandists William Thompson and Anna Wheeler isolated marriage and education as the two major factors responsible for the oppression of women. See Appeal of one Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, To Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery. (1825). Virago, London 1983.

⁴² Hence the term New Moral World.

class oppression, did not succeed. The reasons for this were many and complex and space alone permits only a cursory examination. Firstly, Owenism had to contend with other reform movements in the first half of the nineteenth century, such as Evangelicalism, which were also concerned with changing definitions of femininity and masculinity. Secondly, Owenism occurred in the context of developing industrial capitalism which was having an impact upon both the social relations of production and the sexual division of labour. Finally, Owenism coincided with the emergence of an alternative working-class movement - Chartism.

A similar tension between equality and difference in relation to the role of women in radical politics has been discerned within Chartism.⁴³ William Lovett, one of the early leaders of the Chartist movement, explained in his autobiography that the word 'women' was dropped from the original demand for universal suffrage for fear that its inclusion would retard the progress of the movement.⁴⁴ At the same time, Chartist leaders, such as Feargus O'Connor, sought to mobilise the support of women for the movement solely on the basis of their position as the mothers, wives, sisters and daughters of working men.⁴⁵ Dorothy Thompson has argued that in the early years of the movement class loyalties overrode other divisions such as gender and religion, but that by the mid 1840s women's participation had become less public and visible; suggesting that gender was itself becoming a dividing factor within the working class.⁴⁶ She attributes this in part to political

⁴³ The Chartist movement emerged as a result of working-class dissatisfaction with the 1832 Reform Act and was an active force in Britain until approximately 1850. Its name arose from the adoption of a six-point charter which called for: universal (male) suffrage; the secret ballot; equal electoral districts; annual parliaments; payment of MPs; and the abolition of the property qualification for MPs.

⁴⁴ See Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists. Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution, Pantheon, New York 1984. p.124.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Chapter 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 121-122.

changes, both within Chartism itself, as riots and demonstrations became less frequent and a more formal committee structure was established,⁴⁷ and at a national level with the introduction of police forces, the diminution of specific activity directed against the Poor Law, and the changes in women's working lives.⁴⁸ More importantly, Thompson has argued that these external changes must have been accompanied by changes in the ways in which women and men perceived each other and their roles within society.⁴⁹

Whilst it is difficult to delineate precisely how this change in perception occurred, it is possible to point to a number of factors besides those already mentioned by Dorothy Thompson. The invigoration of paternal ideology with regard to relations of production spoken of by Price suggests a moral dimension which would accord with the Evangelical desire to re-stabilise society through a moral re-structuring of familial relations and,

⁴⁷ Eileen Yeo's work has shown that women held office at neither a local, regional or national level within the National Charter Association, except in their own women-only organisations. The use of paid organisers, an issue hotly debated by men also, contributed to the inability of women to participate. Eileen Yeo, 'Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy', in James Epstein & Dorothy Thompson, eds., The Chartist Experience. Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860. Macmillan, London 1982 pp. 345-380. See especially pp. 349-357.

⁴⁸ D. Thompson, op. cit. p.130. Eric Richards has argued that employment opportunities for women declined as a result of the industrial revolution and the concomitant contraction of rural industry. He is supported in this view by Maxine Berg. See Eric Richards, 'Women in the British Economy Since About 1700: An Interpretation'. History. Vol. 59 1974. pp. 337-357. See also Maxine Berg, 'Women's Work, Mechanisation and the Early Phases of Industrialisation in England' in Patrick Joyce, ed., The Historical Meanings of Work. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987. pp. 64-98. See especially pp. 72-73. Richard Price has made the point that the introduction of machinery frequently meant male reskilling at the expense of female deskilling. R. Price, Labour in British Society. p. 25. Sally Alexander's pioneering work on women's work in London suggests a more complicated picture which indicates not so much that women's employment was contracting in the capital but that it was becoming more casual and restricted to areas, such as home work and sweated labour, which were not included on census returns. The point she emphasises is that a sexual division of labour was becoming more marked with industrialisation. See Sally Alexander, 'Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century London; A Study of the Years 1820-1850', in Juliet Mitchell & Ann Oakley, eds., The Rights and Wrongs of Women. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1976. pp. 59-111.

⁴⁹ D. Thompson. op. cit. p. 131.

by extension, all social relations.⁵⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones' work on the language of Chartism introduces a new political dimension. Stedman Jones has argued that this language cannot simply be read off from the experience of industrialisation. Rather, this language, and the mid-Victorian years of quietude, can be seen in a new perspective if Chartism is viewed primarily as a political movement with its roots to be found in the radicalism of the late eighteenth century. Thus, he suggests, the demise of Chartism arose neither because of an economic upturn in the late 1840s, nor because of a return to social stability, but because the central belief of radicalism in the corrupt nature of political power and the authority of the state was undermined by the introduction of political measures designed to ameliorate economic hardship, such as the Ten Hours Act of 1847.⁵¹

Stedman Jones omits all references to women in his article; nevertheless it is apparent that the political language of radicalism which he identifies as intrinsic to Chartism descended from the work of eighteenth-century radicals such as Thomas Paine. It could be argued, therefore, that the political discourse of Chartism itself precluded women from active participation, particularly at an organisational and decision-making level, because its fundamental subject was male and its fundamental object was male representation. Furthermore, in his examination of language, Stedman Jones has not examined the way in which meanings could be altered according to the gender of the speaker. Thus, whilst Chartists could speak of 'tyrants' and 'slavery', with reference to those with and without political power, the same descriptions were used by some women in the same period

⁵⁰ See also Robert Gray, 'The Languages of Factory Reform in Britain, c.1830-1860', in P. Joyce, ed., The Historical Meanings of Work, pp. 143-179. Esp. pp. 146-156.

⁵¹ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983. pp. 90-178.

to refer to men.⁵² Unlike Owenism, which sought to dismantle gender and class hierarchies in the name of co-operation and harmony, Stedman Jones argues, Chartism sought to abolish the political power of the idle classes in their claim for representation of the productive classes. The former movement was primarily ideological, the latter political.⁵³ The question of women's participation within Chartism, then, would appear to have occurred at a specific conjuncture when Evangelical ideology, political forces and economic changes combined to effect an alteration in the political, social and economic roles of women. What this evidence strongly suggests is not that claims for equality became overridden by assertions of difference in the late nineteenth-century but that these were constituent elements within both feminism and socialism from the very early years of the nineteenth century.

The tensions between arguments for equality and assertions of difference discernible within the Owenite and Chartist movements were not restricted to radical feminist and socialist movements. In the work of arguably the foremost liberal thinker of the mid-Victorian era, John Stuart Mill, similar tensions can be detected. In 1869, Mill published his work The Subjection Of Women.⁵⁴ Like Wollstonecraft, Mill was to argue that contemporary depictions of women were the result of conflating what was traditional with what was natural: 'What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced repression in some

⁵² See B. Taylor, "The Men Are As Bad As Their Masters..." for many examples of the language used by women Owenites in particular. See also Robert Gray, 'The Deconstructing of the English Working Class', Social History, Vol.11, No.3 1986 pp. 363-373 for both a critique of Stedman Jones and a reference to the gendered use of language.

⁵³ G. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism' especially p. 124.

⁵⁴ Although published in 1869, the book had been written some eight years earlier. See Kate Soper, Introduction, The Subjection of Women & The Enfranchisement of Women, Virago, London 1983. p. 1, footnote 3.

directions, unnatural stimulation in others.'⁵⁵ Like Wollstonecraft also, Mill believed that the application of reason to bourgeois sentiments concerning notions of womanhood would expose the fundamentally irrational basis of their arguments. Yet, despite this celebration of the ability of logic to penetrate beneath the veneer of custom, Mill himself was to display considerable confusion over the social nature of the sexual division of labour. On the one hand, he argued: 'The *power* of earning is essential to the dignity of a woman, if she has not independent property.'⁵⁶ On the other hand, he declared:

When the support of the family depends, not on property, but on earnings, the common arrangement, by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure, seems to me in general the most suitable division of labour between the two persons...In an otherwise just state of things, it is not, therefore, I think, a desirable custom, that the wife should contribute by her labour to the income of the family.⁵⁷

To resolve this contradiction, Mill necessarily had to resort to using the very arguments which he set out to refute; namely, that the domestic sphere was the natural sphere for women. The confusion generated here in Mill's logic stems from his attempts to match notions of equality with a belief in the sexual division of labour, for whilst the former represented an attack upon inegalitarianism in bourgeois society, the latter, contrarily, revealed an acceptance of bourgeois thought at the expense of a thorough-going critique of both gender and class oppression. This is particularly evident in his statements concerning the working class.

In the most naturally brutal and morally uneducated part of the lower classes, the legal slavery of the woman, and something in the merely

⁵⁵ John Stuart Mill, 'The Subjection Of Women'. (1869). In The Subjection of Women & The Enfranchisement of Women pp.38-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.89.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* pp87-8.

physical subjection to their will as an instrument, causes them to feel a sort of disrespect and contempt towards their own wife which they do not feel towards any other woman, or any other human being, with whom they come in contact; and which makes her seem to them an appropriate subject for any kind of indignity.⁵⁸

The implication of this statement was that working-class men did not possess the rationality of bourgeois men and were therefore more likely to be even more brutal towards women.

By assuming, firstly, that women should be economically dependent upon their husbands and, secondly, that sections of the working class were naturally brutal towards women, Mill's arguments reveal the constraints placed upon the destruction of gender and class oppression by liberal ideology. The tension noted earlier within the Owenite movement between equality and difference with regard to the liberation of women thus re-surfaced in his work, but with the vital difference that feminism was a bourgeois affair rather than intimately connected with class oppression. By not challenging the bourgeois ideology of separate spheres, and indeed by implying that equality between women and men was more likely to occur among the middle class, it could be argued that Mill assisted in the development of a brand of feminism which re-oriented ideologies of women towards reformism and away from the desire for a radically different society. What was an implicit criticism in Wollstonecraft's work - that formal equality would not challenge the fundamental basis of society - became an explicit aim in Mill, for at no time did he envisage the creation of a new society. Hence, Mill's arguments proposed merely a change in the appearance rather than the substance of society and, moreover, may have helped to shift feminism away from an analysis which included both working-class and middle-class women, as evidenced in the Owenite movement, to one which referred to middle-class women only. If Dorothy

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.84.

Thompson is correct in her assessment that gender and class priorities were becoming separated in the Chartist movement, then it would appear from Mill's comments that this process was more complete by the 1860s.

Although Mill was ultimately unable to perceive equality in terms other than a purely formal, legal sense, he did attempt to detach the language of moralism and sentimentalism from the feminist debate:

I do not know a more signal instance of the blindness with which the world, including the herd of studious men, ignore and pass over all the influences of social circumstances, than their silly depreciation of the intellectual, and silly panegyrics on the moral, nature of women. The complimentary dictum about women's superior goodness may be allowed to pair off with the disparaging one respecting their greater liability to moral bias.⁵⁹

But during the period when Mill was asserting his belief in women's right to political and social individuality, that is, citizenship, the connections between women's separate domestic sphere and their greater moral goodness were becoming strengthened.

From the middle years of the century, until the re-emergence of socialism in England in the 1880s, feminist thought, as articulated in the work of Mill, continued to be influenced by both Evangelical gendered ideology and liberal ideology. Neither ideology, however, remained unchanged or unchanging. As stated earlier, the Evangelicals perceived their attempts to reform society in terms of a personal struggle with God for both women and men. Their struggle was an active engagement with social evils, as evidenced by their role in the anti-slavery movement, which could be, and was, interpreted by some women as a moral duty. Mill's attempt to banish moralism from the debate concerning women, in this context, was unsuccessful primarily because it seemed to deny women one avenue for social activism. Yet the Evangelical concept of the necessity for an ever-vigilant personal struggle

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 142-143.

to achieve a moral life was itself diminishing, to be replaced by a vapid sentimental idealisation of women and their role. In his work 'Of Queens Gardens', written in 1865, John Ruskin spoke of woman's power as being:

for rule, not for battle - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise; she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation...wherever a true wife comes, this home is always around her. The stars only may be over head; the glowworm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot; but home is yet wherever she is...She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise - wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fall from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service - the true changefulness of woman.⁶⁰

Ruskin's statements may well be an extreme example of this idealisation but condensed within his work are the very sentiments which prompted a feminist movement in the 1870s. These sentiments were: the universalisation of the category 'woman' which disregarded class distinctions and portrayed the bourgeois vision of womanhood as the ideal for all women; the idealising of the home as a haven from the outside world; and the denial of autonomy for women. However, at the same time that Ruskin was writing of this sentimental womanhood, its obverse, in the form of prostitution, flourished and women were subjected to a politically and medically motivated attack under the Contagious Diseases Acts.⁶¹

⁶⁰ John Ruskin, Sesame And Lillies & The Political Economy Of Art. (1865). Collins, London & Glasgow n.d. pp. 117-120. See also, Kate Millet, Sexual Politics, Granada, London 1970

⁶¹ The Contagious Diseases Acts were a series of Acts passed and extended between 1864 and 1869 which allowed the authorities to examine for venereal disease any woman suspected of being a prostitute. They were applied mainly in the garrison towns of Britain. For a detailed analysis of the Acts see Judith R. Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class and the State, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980.

Ironically, the universalisation of the concept of 'woman' led to a feminism which argued that all women constituted an oppressed sex-class. The idealising of the home as a haven and the denial of female autonomy in turn led to a feminism which exposed the separate sphere ideology of Victorian society as a hypocritical mechanism for the oppression of all women. All these connections were made by Josephine Butler as the leader of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts when she came into contact with those women who had been prosecuted under the Acts. She recalled later:

the bitter complaint of one of these poor women: 'It is *men, men, only men*, from the first to the last, that we have to do with! To please a man I did wrong at first, then I was flung about from man to man. Men police lay hands on us. By men we are examined, handled, doctored, and messed on with. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayers and reads the Bible for us. We are had up before magistrates who are men, and we never get out of the hands of men till we die!' And as she spoke I thought, 'And it was a Parliament of men only who made this law which treats you as an outlaw. Men alone met in committee over it. Men alone are the executives.' When men, of all ranks, thus band together for an end deeply concerning women, and place themselves like a thick impenetrable wall between woman and woman, and forbid the one class of woman entrance into the presence of the other, the weak, the outraged class, it is time that women should arise and demand their most sacred rights in regard to their sisters.⁶²

Butler's campaign exposed the double sexual standard and the corresponding sexual oppression of women, and publicly divided feminists in the 1870s.⁶³ Through her actions, however, Butler, like the Owenites, once

⁶² Josephine Butler, Letter to the *Shield*, March 9 1870. Quoted in Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public: The Women's Movement 1850-1900*, George Allen & Unwin, London 1979, p. 212.

See also, Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986.

⁶³ R. Strachey, *The Cause*, pp. 196-199. It is important, however, to understand that public statements did not always necessarily accord with private beliefs. For an analysis of Millicent Garrett Fawcett's private views on the Contagious Diseases Acts see Barbara Caine, 'Millicent Garrett Fawcett: a Victorian Liberal Feminist?' in Barbara Caine, E.A. Grosz & Marie de Lepervanche, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and The Critique of Knowledge*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1988 pp. 166-179.

more made sexuality an issue of concern for feminists and made explicit the connections between the ideology which insisted that innocent women in their homes were protected by men and the self-same ideology which argued that women on the streets alone were *ipso facto* prostitutes. Yet her re-statement of the feminist problematic of difference and equality from the perspective of difference and autonomy meant that sex was not linked with class oppression, as it had been by some sections of the Owenite movement, nor was it analysed for the purpose of initiating a new world. Rather, sex became the key element which differentiated all women from men.

This analysis of women as a sex-class tended to dominate feminist discourses up to, and to some extent beyond, the re-emergence of socialist feminism in the 1880s.⁶⁴ It also tended to deny the economic class differences between women, preferring instead to see them as differences in degree rather than differences in kind. As the Englishwomen's Review stated in 1876:

Women, whether seamstresses, factory hands, servants, authoresses, countesses...do form one common class. There may be every variety of education, of thought, of habit...but so long as there is 'class' legislation, so long as the law makes an insurmountable difference between men and women, women must be spoken of as a separate class.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, there is a need to be wary of taking statements which asserted the fundamentally different interests of women and men as necessarily assertions of a philosophical belief in the innate, essential differences between them. As Barbara Taylor has said: 'Words, like ideas, are historical phenomena; they are also historical battlegrounds in which

⁶⁴ See, for example, Christabel Pankhurst's The Great Scourge And How To End It. The Women's Press, London 1913. .

⁶⁵ 'Women As A Class', Editorial, Englishwomen's Review, May 1876. Cited in P. Hollis, Women In Public p. 336.

conflicting intentions and meanings struggle for space.'⁶⁶ With this in mind, it is possible to see expressions of women as a sex-class, firstly, as a realistic description of Victorian society whereby women were defined as inhabiting a separate sphere which was quite different from that inhabited by men and, secondly, as the appropriation of this division and its re-statement in women's favour. However, this analysis had most relevance within a middle-class context. Like most liberal statements, the viewpoint of the middle-class was elevated to one which purported to speak for all classes. Thus it has been argued that this analysis of women as a sex-class 'did not describe the society in which it arose so much as reflect it ideologically'.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this analysis does demonstrate how 'the wants and desires of those who are oppressed are necessarily formed within the existing order';⁶⁸ how the 'ambivalence of needs' Luisa Passerini detected in her study of work ideology and Italian fascism contains both radical and conservative potentials.⁶⁹ Indeed, Josephine Butler's campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts led not only to the formation of groups which were either implicitly or explicitly feminist⁷⁰ but also to

⁶⁶ B. Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 159.

⁶⁷ Joan Kelly, 'The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory', in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan & Judith R. Walkowitz, eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1983, p. 265.

⁶⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, 'What Do Women Want?', *Feminist Review*, No. 20 1985, p. 50.

⁶⁹ Luisa Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Working Class Attitudes to Fascism', in Paul Thompson, ed., *Our Common History. The Transformation of Europe*, Pluto Press, London 1982, p. 72. See also the Introduction to this thesis.

⁷⁰ Such as the Ladies National Association which was formed specifically for the purpose of repealing the C.D. Acts in 1870. Its members included women who were later to become involved in all facets of feminist campaigning such as the socialist Isabella Ford, an early member of the Independent Labour Party and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, later a member of the Women's Social and Political Union. See R. Strachey, *The Cause*, p. 199; and Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930*, Pandora Press, London 1985, p. 28.

the formation of societies which had more interest in controlling the behaviour of working-class women than their liberation.⁷¹

It is this complexity and contradiction which, Philippa Levine has argued in her work, sets feminist campaigns apart from other reform movements from the mid- to late- nineteenth century.⁷² As she writes: 'Feminists in this period both worked within the values promoted in their own society and distanced themselves from the mainstream'.⁷³ Thus, women's campaigns for access to education, both secondary and tertiary, for the right to employment and for the right to vote need to be seen as part of a multi-pronged attack upon a social, political and economic system which denied them those rights. Because of this, Levine has argued, party-political labels, whilst important, tend to fade into the background in the face of this all-embracing movement.⁷⁴ This is not to deny that many leading feminists, such as Butler and Garrett Fawcett, would not have referred to themselves as Liberals. Rather, Levine's point is that the various feminist campaigns cannot simply be reduced to a party political context.

Levine's analysis meshes with that of Susan Kent, albeit from a different perspective. Kent has suggested that sexuality lay at the heart of feminist campaigns. Using a Foucauldian analysis she argues that in the face of the creation of a new medico-scientific epistemological discourse regarding

⁷¹ For example, the National Vigilance Association, which was founded in 1885, which Judith Walkowitz has described as 'a more prurient moral reform group that eschewed the feminist and constitutional goals of the repeal movement'. *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 99. According to Sheila Jeffreys, Josephine Butler was herself a member of this organisation but left when some members of the group proposed to legislate against women involved in prostitution. *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, p. 72.

⁷² Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900*, Hutchinson, London 1987, pp. 13-14.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 17. One problem with this work, however, is that Levine focusses upon women's agency to the detriment of an analysis of the structural constraints upon women's activities.

female sexuality, whose application extended well beyond the medical and scientific spheres into the political, feminists developed a 'reverse discourse' which appropriated the language of the dominant discourse in order to deny the pathology associated with female sexuality and to expose the power relations implicit within that dominant discourse.⁷⁵ These analyses tend to suggest that women's assertion of difference and autonomy from men was not so much an acceptance of male definitions of womanhood as an attempt to positively assert a strong feminine and feminist subjectivity and consciousness.

By the time socialism re-emerged in England in the early 1880s, then, feminist campaigning had been conducted over a number of issues for many years. The dominant theme of feminism, as already stated, was the emphasis upon the community of interest between all women regardless of class. In this analysis difference and autonomy were stressed above equality; gender above class; and female moral superiority above a universal conception of human nature. Moreover, the adherence to these views was shared by women from across the political spectrum.⁷⁶ Yet I believe it would be a mistake to view this feminism as a sharp break from the democratic egalitarianism of Wollstonecraft or the 'utopian' socialism of the Owenites. Feminists in the second half of the nineteenth century had to argue their case in a quite different historical context where their exclusion from the 'public' world of men was more deeply entrenched and more complete than in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Where definitions concerning femininity and masculinity had seemed relatively fluid and open to challenge for Owenites, these definitions

⁷⁵ Susan Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914, Routledge, London 1990. pp. 14-16.

⁷⁶ See the debate between the pro- and anti-suffragists in The Nineteenth Century, June & July 1889, where both sides argued their case from an identical perspective of womanhood.

appeared more fixed later and had, moreover, received legal and political sanction through such legislation as the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Liberal feminists remained the dominant force within feminist organisations, reaching the height of their influence with the campaigns for the extension of the franchise to women in 1884. But liberal feminism, like liberalism itself, both in its political and philosophical form, was in the throes of change. Leading liberal feminists, such as Josephine Butler, were prominent both in calling for a more interventionist role of the state and in responding to that change. As another leading liberal feminist involved in the suffrage campaign, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, declared:

The motherhood of women, either actual or potential, is one of those great facts of everyday life which we must never lose sight of. To women, as mothers, is given the charge of the home and the care of the children. Women are, therefore, by nature as well as by occupation and training, more accustomed than men to concentrate their minds on the home and domestic side of things. But this difference between men and women, instead of being a reason against their enfranchisement, seems to me the strongest possible reason in favour of it; we want the home and the domestic side of things to count for more in politics and in the administration of public affairs than they do at present. We want to know how various kinds of legislative enactments bear on the home and on domestic life. And we want to force our legislators to consider the domestic as well as the political results of any legislation which many of them are advocating.⁷⁷

In Fawcett's work the recourse to nature as an explanation of the differences between the sexes, which Wollstonecraft had explicitly rejected because she saw it as the main mechanism for the oppression of women, was re-stated as the reason why women should be enfranchised. The conflation of liberal philosophy with gendered ideology, developed by Mill in his work The Subjection Of Women, thus became, by the late nineteenth

⁷⁷ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Home and Politics. An Address Delivered At Toynbee Hall and Elsewhere NUWSS, London n.d. p. 3.

century, the strategy for liberation among liberal feminists. However, it should be recognised that women such as Garrett Fawcett were operating at the extreme limits of liberalism. J. A. Hobson may have described liberalism as weak and vacillating in the area of reform towards the end of the nineteenth century but the same cannot be said of liberal women; by appropriating definitions of womanhood for their own purpose, they were both accepting that women and men were different but challenging the view that difference entailed inferiority. When looking at the language used by feminists in the nineteenth century it is crucial that our contemporary understanding of notions such as gender socialisation does not obscure or deny the realities of their world - which was one of fundamental divisions and dichotomies. Hence, we must be alert to the contradictions of that feminism whilst at the same time recognising the constraints which existed.

If the 'woman question' was an issue of public concern and debate throughout much of the nineteenth century, the same cannot be said for socialism. Following the demise of the Owenite and Chartist movements by 1850, socialism in England was espoused by a tiny minority among both the working class and intellectuals, despite the formation of the International Working Men's Association in London in 1864.⁷⁸ Analysing the reasons for this long hiatus in socialism in England, Engels wrote in 1885:

The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working-class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of that monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying-out of Owenism, there has been no Socialism in England. With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working-class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally - the privileged and leading minority not excepted - on

⁷⁸ The IWMA was subsequently known as the First International. See George Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism* (1970). Flamingo, London 1983. pp. 169-186.

a level with its fellow-workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be Socialism again in England.⁷⁹

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which was characterised by 'a long period of falling prices and profits, and, for certain industries, notably agriculture, of definite decline',⁸⁰ the end of England's industrial monopoly predicted by Engels appeared to be becoming a reality.

Most historians would agree with Engels' statement that the third quarter of the nineteenth century represented a period of general prosperity and advance in the form of factory legislation, trade unionism, public health measures and, particularly, the passing of the Second Reform Act in 1867. However, considerable debate has arisen in the last twenty years over these and other comments he made in the preface to his work The Condition of the Working Class in England. Robert Gray, for example, has criticised Engels' mechanistic approach to the relationship between economic conditions and socialism.⁸¹ But most of the debate revolves around Engels' comments that: 'the great Trades' Unions...the organizations of those trades in which the labour of *grown-up men* predominates, or is alone applicable...form an aristocracy among the working-class, they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relatively comfortable position, and they accept it as final'.⁸² This is a highly complex debate and, as it will be dealt with fully in Chapter Three, I shall not analyse it in any great depth here. What is important is that this debate is not simply one of historiography, the notion of a 'labour

⁷⁹ Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845). Preface to the English edition 1892. Granada, London 1969. p. 34.

⁸⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, ed., Labour's Turning Point 1880-1900 (1948). Harvester Press, Brighton 1974. p. xlv.

⁸¹ Robert Gray, The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain c. 1850-1914 Macmillan, London 1981. pp. 52-53.

⁸² Engels, *op.cit.* p.31.

aristocracy' was also accepted by some contemporaries.⁸³ Theodore Rothstein, an active member of the Social Democratic Federation, later wrote:

As against the position of the working class of other countries in similar circumstances, the English proletariat did not find itself isolated, but became the centre of attention of bourgeois reformers who quite correctly realised their mission: when the workers grew disappointed with the revolutionary struggle, these reformers showered their "love" on them, built a moral bridge between them and the capitalist class to yield a little to the workers' demands...since that period happened to coincide with a spell of economic prosperity...the ideas preached by the reformers struck deep roots among the masses and became an integral part of the mental outlook of the English proletariat.⁸⁴

In an argument which looks at the last rather than the third quarter of the century, and which attempts to move beyond the 'labour aristocracy' equation of class collaboration and political reformism made by Rothstein, John Saville has argued that workers exhibited 'a fractured consciousness': 'On the one hand, an "economist" class consciousness continuously renewed from within the industrial sector; but on the other, a pervasive sense of collaboration in political affairs.'⁸⁵ In other words, Saville argues, the economic climate and industrial changes which occurred towards the end of

⁸³ Thus the trade unionist George Potter wrote in 1870: 'The working man belonging to the upper class of his order is a member of the aristocracy of the working classes'. Cited in R. Gray, The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Theodore Rothstein, From Chartism To Labourism. Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement (1929). Lawrence & Wishart, London 1983. pp. 196-197. Rothstein's comments owe much to Lenin's analysis of imperialism and its ability to "bribe" the upper strata of the proletariat. See V. I. Lenin, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916). Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1973. p. 125. This approach has also been adopted by John Foster in his work, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution. Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns. For an enlightening critique of Foster's work see Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution', in Languages of Class, pp. 25-75.

⁸⁵ John Saville, 'The Ideology of Labourism', in R. Benewick, R.N. Berki & B. Parekh, eds., Knowledge and Belief in Politics. The Problem of Ideology. George Allen & Unwin, London 1973. p. 217.

the century fostered a sense of class solidarity, yet politically the majority of workers still sought allegiance with the Liberal Party.⁸⁶ Thus, whilst this period was marked by economic militancy as exemplified by the rise of the new unionism it was, at the same time, still marked by an identity of interest politically between workers and, predominantly, the Liberal Party. This notion of a 'fractured' or ambivalent consciousness on the part of skilled workers, it may be argued, is also important for an understanding of working-class attitudes towards masculinity and femininity.

The attitude of skilled workers, in particular, towards women cannot solely be ascribed to the economic changes of the late nineteenth century; to do so would be to imply a mechanistic relationship between the economic and other spheres. It must also be seen as part of a tradition within the labour movement itself, as well as related to wider social and ideological developments. As already discussed, from as early as the 1840s a division between class and gender priorities was evidenced in some key sections of the working class - notably in the Chartist movement. More precisely, this attitude was bound up with 'natural' notions of what constituted masculinity and 'manliness'. For if in bourgeois ideology femininity was represented as emotional and economic dependence within the separate sphere of the family, masculinity represented the converse: independence and strength through work.⁸⁷ This gendered ideology transcended class divisions whilst also exhibiting class specific features. Thus the masculinity of the skilled worker conformed to a self-assertive masculine ideal propagated by the bourgeoisie and yet was, at times, at variance with that ideal. Masculinity, as possession of a skill in particular, had the potential to reveal the contradictions inherent within gendered ideology

⁸⁶ See T. Rothstein, From Chartism To Labourism, p. 270.

⁸⁷ See L. Davidoff & C. Hall, Family Fortunes, pp. 450-451 for an examination of the impact of this definition of masculinity for men of the middle class.

especially when the independence of the skilled worker was eroded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ It was a masculine subjectivity that was as idealised as that assigned to women. As Sheila Rowbotham has written:

a vital source of working-class male dignity has been bound up with having a skill... Thus the destruction of skills, an important area of creativity allowed to some workers, has been countered by a passionate assertion of manhood within the cultural assumptions of the Labour movement. Economic militancy, class pride and confidence, political involvement in revolutionary and shop-floor organisation have combined to make workers like printers and engineers 'advanced' in the Leninist sense. But groups like these have also been extremely suspicious of the threat of women and the unskilled generally.⁸⁹

Although Rowbotham is writing about workers today, whose political allegiance is primarily to the Labour Party, the defensive and suspicious attitude towards women and the unskilled that she describes echoes down the years from the late nineteenth century. In that earlier period, adherence to the Liberal Party politically, combined with hostility to women workers, exemplified the conflation of bourgeois liberalism with gendered ideology. Moreover, the response of those workers to female employment, with calls for state protection in some industries and total restriction in others, indicated how certain workers maintained a gendered view of society which enabled them simultaneously to accept and reject intervention on the part

⁸⁸ Masculinity has only recently become the subject of historical attention and there is still little literature on the subject. However, Keith McClelland's recent work analyses the complexities associated with the notion of independence; for this did not only mean the ability to provide for wives and families without either of those groups having to work for wages, it also meant such things as the possession of a skill, membership of a working men's association, and a specific relationship with employers. Thus, masculinity could also mean working-class solidarity in the face of capitalist attempts to destroy or disrupt any of the above conditions. Keith McClelland, 'Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the "Representative Artisan" in Britain, 1850-1880', Gender & History, Vol. 1. No. 2. Summer 1989. pp. 164-177

⁸⁹ Sheila Rowbotham, 'The Women's Movement And Organising For Socialism', in Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal & Hilary Wainwright, Beyond The Fragments. Feminism and The Making of Socialism, Merlin Press, London 1979. p. 122.

of the state.⁹⁰ As was the case with feminists in the late nineteenth century, skilled workers' espousal of an assertive masculinity and their apparent acceptance of bourgeois gendered ideology needs to be set in its historical context. Thus, Saville's use of the term 'fractured consciousness' illustrates how the identification of possession of a skill with independence was the expression of a strong class consciousness and did not therefore necessarily entail an acceptance of the meaning attached to independence in a bourgeois context. It is possible to argue that masculinity here represented a working-class male defence against the exploitative tendencies in relations of production under industrial capitalism. It is, however, also illustrative of the extent to which notions of class and class consciousness were themselves gendered.

The socialist groups which emerged in the 1880s, such as the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, therefore had to confront two central problems. On the one hand, there existed a feminist movement, predominantly middle-class in composition, which increasingly defined women as a sex-class and built their campaigns upon women's differences and autonomy from men. On the other hand, there also existed an organised section of the working class with a developed class consciousness yet a reformist political complexion. Put at its simplest, this seemingly represented an irreconcilable tension between gender and class, with the former negating class differences between women whilst the latter remaining blind to the impact of gender upon class. Once again, the

⁹⁰ As Henry Broadhurst declared at the 1877 Trades Union Congress: 'They knew it was very natural for ladies to be impatient of restraint at any time - and therefore they might imagine the uneasiness which would be created when the law of the nation prescribed rules and regulations...but they would never be able to lift woman to her proper sphere unless they had some restrictions put upon the greed of those who would work their mothers or sisters like dogs or slaves for the sake of gain.' Reported in the Women's Union Journal, Vol. 2. No. 21. October 1877. WTUL Papers. One commentator has suggested that Broadhurst's remarks concerning women workers were untypical of trade unionists at this time. The point I wish to make here is that overt state intervention in women's working conditions was considered more acceptable than for men. See Pat Thane, 'Late Victorian Women', in T.R. Gourvish & Alan O'Day, eds., Later Victorian Britain 1867-1900, Macmillan, London 1988. p. 202.

problematic common to both feminism and socialism - equality or difference - was to the fore; re-stated in the morally charged language of the late nineteenth century as moral superiority versus equality. And yet, straddling the feminist and labour movements was a common belief in liberalism - 'and neo-liberalism'⁹¹ - and a shared language of moralism through their common acceptance of gendered ideology.

Socialists and feminists had to contend not simply with the weight of historical tradition over the past century which was concerned to present the customary as natural, nor solely with a liberal philosophy which stressed individual rights at the expense of collective action, but also with a mode of thought which perceived and acted upon a conception of society as composed of a series of dichotomies between, pre-eminently, the genders and the classes. When, at the turn of the century a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party, Isabella Ford, declared: 'It sometimes seems to me as if we had the whole world to fight; certainly every form of conventional thought must be fought',⁹² she was not just stating the problems inherent within the heritage of socialism and feminism, she was also highlighting the need for a change of consciousness. The difficulty was, as Joan Kelly has written, to make people aware 'that woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally'.⁹³ In other words, the socialists and feminists had to connect the oppression of women within the family and within society, and the oppression of the working class, with the complex social relations which often served to mask the reality, or totality, of that oppression.

⁹¹ A term used by Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz to indicate the persistence of the individualist critique of collectivism within the new currents of Fabianism and new Liberalism, both of which were collectivist. Stuart Hall & Bill Schwarz, 'State and Society, 1880-1930'. pp. 30-31.

⁹² Isabella Ford, 'Women As Trade Unionists'. Women's Trade Union Review. No. 36. January 1900. p. 12. WTUL Papers.

⁹³ J. Kelly, 'The Doubled Vision Of Feminist Theory'. p. 264.

Yet, despite these obstacles to the attainment of a socialist feminist consciousness, the socialists and feminists could also look back to a tradition which, although submerged for almost half a century, had not completely died out. Old Chartists and Owenites were still alive and their influence was felt both in the mid-Victorian feminist movement and, for example, in the Secularist movement.⁹⁴ Younger socialist feminists such as Julia Varley, a member of the National Federation of Women Workers,⁹⁵ and the suffragette Hannah Mitchell could both ascribe their own militancy to Chartist forebears.⁹⁶ The communitarian vision of the Owenites, their sexual radicalism and utopian hopes, were not destroyed when the movement proper ceased to exist. Many of those earlier dreams did re-surface to represent once again an alternative vision of society.

The various individual campaigns through which socialist feminism became evident, such as trade unionism, the fight for women's suffrage, and the campaigns which were built around various social and political reforms, are the subject of the following chapters and will not, therefore, be discussed here. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with how the socialist feminists of the 1880s sought to envision a new society through the creation of a new consciousness.

The case for a socialist feminism was expressed most clearly by Enid Stacy, one of a number of prominent women speakers who came from Bristol.⁹⁷ In a lecture on the 'Ideals of Citizenship' in 1899, she explained

⁹⁴ For a description of the continuation of Owenite ideas see B. Taylor, Eye and the New Jerusalem, Chapter IX.

⁹⁵ See The East Anglian Times, September 2 1909. GTC 300d/8.

⁹⁶ Hannah Mitchell, The Hard Way Up. The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell Suffragette and Rebel. Virago, London 1977. p. 163. Emmeline Pankhurst was also to speak of her grandfather who was at Peterloo. See Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement. An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals (1931). Virago, London 1977. p. 53.

⁹⁷ The socialist feminists from Bristol and their role in the movement will be discussed in the following chapter.

that 'the ideal citizenship aims at the realisation of the full and perfect life for all', which could only be attained 'by the co-operative and sympathetic labour of men and women (equally affecting and affected by the new conditions) side by side. It is impossible to divide life as before into public and private'.⁹⁸ By linking socialism and feminism in this manner, Stacy exposed and analysed many of the facets of bourgeois ideology, from its dichotomous, gendered view of society through to individualism. Implicit in this critique was her recognition of the balance between seeing women and men as agents for change and simultaneously defined by their social circumstances. Thus Stacy was not arguing for revolution, in the sense of an abrupt break with the past, rather she noted that although the framework for social change needed to be located within existing society it could only be initiated by an altered consciousness of how a new society could be created.

This connection between the home and public life was to be a constant theme in Stacy's work. In another article entitled 'The Labour Movement and the Home', she stated that 'the great thing we have to remember in connection with this Labour Movement is that the real interests of home and country are identical'.⁹⁹

How many magnificent battles will be won for Labour - for you, your homes, your little ones - when women of all countries realise fully the fact that the best way to make homes happy, to free them from want and care, is not for each father to guard and fight for his own little flock against the fathers of other little flocks, but for all workers to stand together, women equally with men, determined to fling off in many a hard and bitter fight the tyranny of employers, class prejudice, and vested interests, as a necessary prelude to a society in which all men and women may work together in peace and harmony, free from

⁹⁸ Quoted by Angela Tuckett, niece of Enid Stacy, in 'Our Enid' an unpublished manuscript. My thanks go to both Angela and to Ellen Malos for allowing me to see this manuscript.

⁹⁹ Enid Stacy, 'The Labour Movement And The Home'. The Labour Prophet, March 1893. p. 21. BLHE 1880-1900.

fear of want, no longer troubled by the unsatisfied cravings which spring from lack of development - the proud and happy parents of noble children.¹⁰⁰

Stacy urged upon the ILP, from the early days of its formation in 1893, the necessity of the 'formation of women's associations in connection with all branches of the Independent Labour Party wherever possible', because the reason 'there was so little sympathy between husbands and wives', was that 'the woman was so much shut up in the home and her interests were so largely apart from those of her husband'.¹⁰¹

But Stacy's most important contribution to the formation of a socialist feminism came in 1897 when she contributed a chapter, 'A Century Of Women's Rights', to Edward Carpenter's Forecasts Of The Coming Century.¹⁰² Here she described the mid-Victorian women's movement as 'a perfectly natural result of the various movements which have agitated and modified the European mind since the French Revolution first brought the words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" into the whirl of everyday life'.¹⁰³ 'Was it any wonder', Stacy asked, that the middle-class woman should 'apply this to her own case? She found her lot in life not only unpleasant in itself, but fixed for her by laws and conventions which she attempted to break through by the application of the very principles which were dominating middle class Britain.'¹⁰⁴ These campaigns on the part of middle-class women, firstly for employment opportunities and then for the right to vote, Stacy described as symptomatic of the period when individualism was the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the Second Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party, 1894 p. 10. BLHE 1880-1900.

¹⁰² Enid Stacy, 'A Century Of Women's Rights', In Edward Carpenter, ed., Forecasts Of The Coming Century. Labour Press, Manchester 1897. pp. 86-101.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 87.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. pp. 88-89.

dominant philosophy, 'but at the present juncture, when we are passing through the transition from Commercialism to Collectivism, it may be inadvisable and impossible to give each woman this perfectly unfettered choice...At the present time it seems to be their duty to submit to regulations which will help the more easy and speedy transition to a time when an unfettered choice will be a *reality* in industry'.¹⁰⁵

'Without venturing to prophesy', Stacy proceeded to 'point out some of the developments which are not only historically probable but indispensable in the opinion of the believers in the powers and duties of women as citizens.'¹⁰⁶ Such people, she felt, could not be satisfied until women were free:

1. As individual women. The right to their own persons, and the power of deciding whether they will be mothers or not. The law actually denies even this elementary right to married women at present!
2. As wives. Perfect equality and reciprocity between husband and wife. This necessitates legal changes, notably as regards the Law of Divorce; e.g., whether the law be made laxer or more stringent it must affect both sexes alike.
3. As mothers. Guardianship of their children on the same terms as in the case of fathers. Much has been done here, but the law is still somewhat unfair to women.
4. As citizens. The possession of the imperial as well as local franchise, and full citizens' rights.
5. As workers. (a) For the present - whilst admitting the necessity of much regulation and many restrictions - to make as many of such regulations as possible applicable to both sexes. (b) Ultimately to obtain such a co-operative commonwealth as will ensure to each citizen, irrespective of sex, a choice of employment indicated by the results of education and only limited by individual capacity.¹⁰⁷

Stacy concluded her chapter by stating that:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 99.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 100.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. pp. 100-101.

The watchword of the movement in future will, I believe, be no longer 'Women's Rights'. The true aim of reformers is to consider neither Men's nor Women's rights *qua* men and women, but to secure to each human being such conditions as will conduce to full development as an individual and a useful life of service to the community.¹⁰⁸

Thus, Stacy believed both immediate and special legislation was required to remove women's specific disadvantages and also that this could only be successful if accompanied by the establishment of a collectivist society. In so doing, Stacy attempted to transcend the tensions evident within the feminist and labour movements of difference and equality, and independence (or autonomy) and alliance.

Although the reforms spoken of by Stacy were primarily of a material nature, she was not blind to the persistence of patriarchal attitudes amongst socialists themselves: 'The leaders of the working-class agitation were nearly all Socialists, and therefore believers in equality between men and women, *at least in theory*, however many traces of the Old Adam might show themselves from time to time in their actual conduct.'¹⁰⁹ Neither did she hesitate to write in the socialist paper the Clarion: 'The Labour Party inscribes Adult Suffrage on its political programme; but in the mind of several of its masculine members there is a curious half-defined antipathy to it - an antipathy often but half conscious of its own entity, which nevertheless eagerly picks up and exhibits any item of news which is supposed to tell against the "New Woman".'¹¹⁰

Although she was aware of the sexism within the socialist movement, Stacy's programme of reform again reveals one of the most persistent problems for all feminists, regardless of their political affiliations: how to

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 101.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 93.

¹¹⁰ Enid Stacy, 'Woman's Suffrage'. The Clarion January 12, 1896. Copy courtesy of Angela Tuckett.

reconcile the need for the special treatment of women, for example, in areas such as child custody and employment, with assertions for absolute equality between the sexes. Stacy herself sought to resolve this problem by arguing that the attainment of a socialist feminist society required not just special reforms for women but at the same time a change in consciousness. Indeed, many of her journal articles were based upon this.¹¹¹ In so doing, Stacy was articulating the fact that a socialist revolution had to be more than economic or political or social, it had to strike at the heart of cultural life itself.

Enid Stacy was a member of both the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society. Membership of more than one socialist group was not uncommon in the years leading up to 1900. But whilst cross-membership frequently occurred at a local level, there were significant political differences between the four main socialist societies which emerged in the 1880s and 1890s: the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society, the Socialist League, and the Independent Labour Party. Many of these differences are the subject of the following two chapters. Here I shall briefly outline the major differences between them as a background to their ideologies concerning women.

The Social Democratic Federation, led by Henry Hyndman, was formed in 1884 and was a self-professed Marxist organisation. In reality, under the influence of Hyndman, the Federation has been seen as a peculiar mixture of conservatism and Marxism, which combined support for England's imperialist adventures with a belief in the imminence of the revolution.¹¹²

¹¹¹ See the series of articles she wrote for The Clarion between March 1894 and June 1894. See also her articles in the Labour Prophet. In particular, 'Home and Labour', February 1894 and 'The Labour Movement and The Home' March 1893.

¹¹² See E.P. Thompson, William Morris, Romantic To Revolutionary. (1955). Pantheon Books, New York 1976. pp. 292-297. See also Chushichi Tsuzuki, H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1961.

The Fabian Society, also formed in 1884, eschewed political labels,¹¹³ preferring to see itself as a propaganda organisation. Its most prominent and enduring leaders were George Bernard Shaw, Hubert Bland, Sydney Olivier, Graham Wallas, Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb, many of whom were either academics or civil servants. As experts in the 'social problem' they supported a socialism from above, to be realised through the permeation of the state apparatuses. Because the development of the collectivist state was seen by Fabians as an organic process ('the inevitability of gradualness' in Sidney Webb's famous phrase) they abandoned the notion of the class struggle. David Sutton has argued that the Fabians:

replaced the class discourse of socialism with a 'nationalist' discourse. Citizenship replaced class. In terms of political action this nullified the independence and vitality of working-class demands. A change in consciousness was not a necessary prerequisite for social change. Their elitist programme assumed that political subjects were malleable, and could be constructed from above.¹¹⁴

The Socialist League was formed in 1884 from a breakaway group of the Social Democratic Federation. Its members included William Morris, Ernest Belfort Bax and Eleanor Marx. According to the Manifesto of the League it advocated 'the principles of Revolutionary International Socialism; that is, we seek a change in the basis of Society - a change which would destroy the distinctions of classes and nationalities'.¹¹⁵ The class struggle was the means for achieving the new society; from this would stem a change of

¹¹³ Frederick Keddell told Percival Chubb that it was considered best to avoid any 'definite statement...until we understand more clearly how far we all go together in the direction of Socialism'. Quoted in Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians Quartet Books, London 1979. pp. 28-29.

¹¹⁴ David Sutton, 'Radical Liberalism, Fabianism and Social History', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz & David Sutton, eds., Making Histories. Studies in History-Writing and Politics. Hutchinson, London 1982. p. 34. Sutton's analysis here is extremely contentious and I shall be taking issue with it in Chapter 6.

¹¹⁵ The Manifesto of the Socialist League July 5, 1885. Reprinted in E.P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary. Appendix 1. p. 732.

consciousness which would bring about a state of equality and harmony. The Manifesto explicitly rejected the Fabian policy of permeation, arguing: 'No better solution would be that State Socialism, by whatever name it may be called, whose aim it would be to make concessions to the working class while leaving the present system of capital and wages still in operation: no number of merely administrative changes, until the workers are in possession of all political power, would make any real approach to Socialism.'¹¹⁶

Finally, the Independent Labour Party was founded in 1893. Unlike the three earlier organisations, the ILP was formed with the intention of becoming a political party with representatives sitting in the House of Commons. The ILP differed from them also in that it did not represent a particular strand of socialist thought but a coalition of the varied elements which comprised the three societies. A year after its formation Ramsay MacDonald, later to be the first Labour Prime Minister and, in his youth, a member of all the socialist societies except the Socialist League,¹¹⁷ wrote to Enid Stacy explaining his views concerning the origins of the ILP: 'The order of the infall of the many tributaries which make up the I.L.P. is more important than an enumeration of those tributaries, and you will find, it seems, that the socialist conversion was not primary - e.g. Keir Hardie in 1888 saying he was not a Socialist - but secondary, as a necessity imposed upon the new party to find a sufficiently ample basis for independent existence.'¹¹⁸ MacDonald's words were a reference to the eclectic nature of

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 736.

¹¹⁷ In 1885 MacDonald was for a very short time a member of the Social Democratic Federation when he joined its branch in Bristol.

¹¹⁸ July 1894. My thanks go to Angela Tuckett for allowing me to see MacDonald's letters to Enid Stacy which are in her possession.

the ILP which was reflected in the many debates which occurred over aims and ideals.¹¹⁹

As the brief descriptions above illustrate, the political differences between the various socialist groups, at a national level, were apparently extreme, ranging from advocacy of revolution to reformism and all the shades in between. But as Enid Stacy's statements as a member of the Fabian Society also illustrate, in the years leading up to the turn of the century it was possible for individuals and local branches of the societies to forge their own version of socialism regardless of the opinions of their leaders. Nonetheless, the publicly expressed views of the leading members of the socialist societies did have an impact upon both how women were perceived within those societies and upon ideologies of women.

If Ramsay MacDonald, in his letter to Enid Stacy, was right in his contention that the conversion to socialism was not primary as far as Keir Hardie was concerned, he was incorrect to the extent that he denied the primacy of a socialist conversion for socialists and feminists generally. The testimonies of many of those people, particularly those who had contact with the Socialist League, the Clarion movement¹²⁰ and the ILP, speak eloquently of that conversion and how socialism became not simply a political creed but a new way of life.¹²¹ If the new world has proved difficult to attain it has, at the same time, proved to be one of the most enduring visions of English socialism. Robert Owen's *New Moral World*, William Morris's News From Nowhere¹²² and Robert Blatchford's Merrie

¹¹⁹ See below, Chapter Three.

¹²⁰ The Clarion movement was inspired by Robert Blatchford and was predominant in the north of England, particularly around Lancashire.

¹²¹ See, for example, Laurence Thompson, The Enthusiasts. A Biography of John and Katharine Bruce Glasier, Gollancz, London 1971.

¹²² This book first appeared as a serial in Commonweal, January–October 1890.

England¹²³ between them inspired several generations of English socialists and feminists. Moreover, not only did these works inspire the desire for a new way of life but they became, in the hands of some, the impetus behind a desire for the re-working of all oppressive relationships within society. If Owenism had sought to unite a vision of altered personal relations with radical working-class politics, Morris and Blatchford¹²⁴ in their turn rejuvenated those connections, not from a position apart from society but from within. Thus whilst in the earlier period socialist feminism represented an alternative to capitalism, in the 1880s it represented a sustained critique and struggle within capitalism itself.

Both Morris and Blatchford sought to change the consciousness of the working class by revealing the necessary relationship between theory and practice. They did so by emphasising the need for a new way of life, not merely politically or economically, but culturally. Blatchford's Clarion groups, which included cycling, rambling, touring propaganda vans and the establishment of club houses where cheap holidays were offered, gave working-class women and men an alternative set of cultural practices based upon the premise that socialism should penetrate every aspect of human activity. Such activities had a dual purpose for they also served to cement an intense commitment to socialism. It was the breadth of this new vision of socialism, concerning as it did the totality of lived experience, which led many to proclaim it as the new religion.¹²⁵

¹²³ Merrile England first appeared in The Clarion, 1892-1893.

¹²⁴ Robert Blatchford, 1851-1943, founded and edited the Clarion newspaper from 1892. Blatchford played an instrumental role in bringing about the formation of the ILP in 1893.

¹²⁵ Among those who used this phrase were: William Morris; Robert Blatchford; and the Glasiers. For an interesting analysis of this language see Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain 1883-1896'. History Workshop Journal, Issue 4, Autumn 1977.

Socialism, like feminism, in the 1880s owed its theoretical and pragmatic diversity to a complex historical inheritance. From the late eighteenth century onwards the problematic of equality and difference provided both the links and the tensions between socialism and feminism. But by the end of the nineteenth century gendered ideology had become deeply embedded in the feminist and labour movements alike. It was in these circumstances that the religion of socialism, informed by the works of William Morris, Robert Blatchford and Edward Carpenter, led to a questioning of all facets of social life, both personal and political: indeed, it made the personal political. Its intellectual roots can be traced back directly to that aspect of Owenite thought which challenged the construction of masculinity as well as femininity and argued for the simultaneous transformation of both. But this strand of the religion of socialism sustained that challenge in the context of the class struggle. It aimed at nothing less than a complete transformation of society. It is to this intense desire for a new world, a new way of relating for women and men, that will be examined next.

CHAPTER TWO

MAKING SOCIALISTS: PERSONAL AND POLITICAL LIFE 1883-1893

One of the features of the socialist revival in the 1880s and 1890s much commented upon by historians was the widespread use of religious language.¹ In part this was a response to the deteriorating conditions in which workers found themselves as a result of the high unemployment experienced towards the end of the 1870s and during the 1880s. It was the expression of a deeply felt hope for the future of a new society and a new way of life amidst the present misery. Partly, too, it was the continuing expression of a long tradition within the labour movement generally and English socialism in particular which stretched at least as far back as the revolutionaries of the seventeenth century.² But it was also the language of those who came from the tradition of the chapel and the church.³ In addition, there may well have been a vaguer, less tangible, feeling of the 'fin de siècle' prompted by memories of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The conjunction of these elements within the socialist movement elicited a response from women and men which was akin to a religious conversion.

The use of religious language and millennialist terminology and its secular counterpart, the language of idealism, by the early socialists has

¹ This fascination with the predominance of religious language is reflected in the titles given by historians to their works. For example: Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion Of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896' History Workshop Journal, Issue 4, Autumn 1977; Sheila Rowbotham & Jeffrey Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis Pluto Press, London 1977.

² See Christopher Hill, Puritanism and Revolution. The English Revolution of the 17th Century. (1958) Schocken Books, New York 1970. Especially Chapter Three, 'The Norman Yoke'.

³ Stanley Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism. The Struggle For A New Consciousness Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1973. p. 21.

produced several different responses by historians. As Stephen Yeo writes, it has been seen:

as an anachronistic, 'substitute' religion, filling a gap left by declining 'orthodox' religion...as the moralising dress worn by socialists because of the historical peculiarities of British popular and middle-class culture...[and] as a line of fissure along which Marxist ideology cracked when it met class organisation in national culture.⁴

Implicit in all three interpretations is the inherent backwardness of indigenous socialist ideology, or its converse, the essentially bourgeois nature of the British proletariat.⁵ Implicit, too, in these interpretations is the belief that the working class will always, naturally, tend towards socialism; a teleological view suggesting that it is extrinsic factors which intervene to divert an inherently socialistic working class from its 'natural' destiny. Yeo goes on to offer his own interpretation, which is that of a complete phase in itself in the social history of socialism, with its own dynamic.⁶ Furthermore, he argues, this phase did not expire of its own accord - although it certainly did contribute to its own demise - it was also actively destroyed.⁷ Yeo's interpretation of the destruction of this phase of socialism in the 1890s as primarily the result of a counter-attack by employers against the new unionism has been recently challenged as inadequate to the task of explaining why the language of religion was a

⁴ S. Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion Of Socialism In Britain, 1883-1896'. pp. 6-7.

⁵ For a condemnatory article on the consciousness of the working class see Tom Nairn, 'The English Working Class', in Robin Blackburn, ed., Ideology in Social Science. Readings in Critical Social Theory. Fontana/Collins, Glasgow 1972. pp. 187-206.

⁶ S. Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion Of Socialism In Britain, 1883-1896'. p. 7.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 31-32.

persistent current within socialism well into the twentieth century.⁸ But historians Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks support Yeo's interpretation in their own study of this period.⁹

In this chapter I will argue that it was the very prospect of a new society and altered relations between people, vividly portrayed by the religious and 'utopian' language of many socialists, which attracted recruits to the new movement. The language used by socialists did not simply strike a responsive chord within those members of the working class who had been reared within the utopian tradition of socialism, it also promised for some women the dawning of a new era of hope precisely at the point when those hopes had been dashed by the failure to obtain some measure of enfranchisement under the 1884 Reform Act.¹⁰ It was this vision of an altered way of life, both on a personal level in the ordinary relations between women and men and on a socio-economic level in the relations between capitalist and worker, that nourished members of the socialist movement of the 1880s and 1890s and has continued to do so long after the

⁸ Bill Schwarz & Martin Durham, "A safe and sane labourism:" socialism and the state 1910-1914', in Mary Langan & Bill Schwarz, eds., Crises in the British State 1880-1930 Hutchinson, London 1985. pp. 129-130. They argue that one of the ambiguities within the Labour Party during the early years of the twentieth century was the co-existence of a bureaucratic mentality with this religion of socialism. What they appear to have confused here though is the persistence of language with the religion of socialism as a vital movement.

⁹ S. Rowbotham & J. Weeks, Socialism and the New Life. Especially pp. 16-23.

¹⁰ Up to this point feminists had achieved such notable successes as the Married Women's Property Act (1882). Further legislative successes were achieved later in the decade, for example, the Guardianship of Infants' Act (1886) and the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (1886). However, Gladstone's refusal to even consider a small measure of female enfranchisement in 1884 dealt a severe blow to the most organised section of the feminist movement - the suffrage campaigners. For a history of women's campaigns at this time see Ray Strachey, The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928). Virago, London 1978.

'utopian' aspirations have largely vanished from the nominally socialist agenda of the Labour Party.¹¹

The feminist problematic of equality and difference, reformulated in socialist terms as independence and alliance, was to the fore in this period when the thrust was towards making socialists by changing consciousness. During the 1880s and early 1890s, within both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, there was an explicit hostility towards those working-class organisations such as the trade unions which were not socialist in orientation and which were seen as diverting energy away from the task of creating a socialist society.¹² For the Socialist League, in particular, a change of consciousness was seen as a prerequisite for the attainment of a socialist society based upon freedom and equality. They eschewed, therefore, all forms of 'collaboration' with existing institutions which either hindered or did not recognise the need for this change of consciousness.

The stress upon the moment of conversion, the process of making socialists, it will be argued, represented both the strengths and the weaknesses of the language of religion. Its strength lay in the powerful effect such a conversion had upon individuals. It was literally a moment of revelation and, as such, produced a level of commitment which far exceeded that usually required of members of a political group. Its weaknesses were three-fold. Firstly, the use of religious metaphors could obscure political differences by proclaiming a spiritual unity between disparate groups - especially between women and men, but also between classes - which did

¹¹ For an examination of how far the Labour Party has moved from its origins and the extent to which the Right in Britain has taken over the concepts of freedom and equality see Stuart Hall, 'The Battle For Socialist Ideas In The 1980s', in The Socialist Register 1982 Merlin Press, London 1982. pp. 1-19.

¹² The attitudes of socialist groups to trade unions and to the parliamentary process are the subject of the following chapter and so will merely be alluded to here.

not necessarily correspond with lived experience. Secondly, religious language could lead to an emphasis upon the moment of conversion at the expense of a strategy to achieve socialism. Finally, such language could produce a tendency towards moral conservatism. These strengths and weaknesses of religious language may be said to have paralleled an earlier division in religious language between the moral conservatism of the Evangelicals and those elements of Owenism which used also religious metaphor to challenge existing social and sexual inequalities.¹³ This complex and contradictory tradition itself informed the consciousness of those who were attracted to socialism through the religious language it employed. From these strengths and weaknesses of the religious and quasi-religious language employed by the socialists, it will be argued, two distinct versions of socialism emerged.

The aim of this chapter is to examine those different versions of socialism. It will examine in detail one religious discourse of socialism which held a change of consciousness to be pivotal in the attainment of a socialist society and which promised a conjunction of feminist and socialist aims. This examination begins by looking at two of the most popular socialist figures of the 1880s and 1890s, William Morris and Edward Carpenter. Between them, these two men were the major exponents of a socialism which questioned social and sexual inequalities. Their work is examined critically in the light of its implications for both feminism and socialism. Secondly, this chapter will examine an alternative religious discourse, that of moral conservatism, which was implicitly hostile to a socialism that questioned sexual relationships as well as economic relationships. This alternative discourse was evident amongst those socialists who maintained an attachment to established religion and who

¹³ For example, Catherine and John Goodwyn Barmby established the Communist Church in 1841. See Barbara Taylor, Eye and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, Virago, London 1983. pp. 172-181.

saw the family not as the site for the formation and transformation of oppressive relationships but as the bastion of individual freedom. Finally, in order to see how these socialisms affected women and men involved in the socialist movement, the chapter takes Bristol as a case study of the impact of socialism at a local level.

Between the years 1880 to 1885 a number of socialist groups were established in London. These included: the Labour Emancipation League (1881);¹⁴ the Democratic Federation (1881), which changed its name to the Social Democratic Federation in 1884; the Socialist League (1884); and the Fabian Society (1884) which emerged from Thomas Davidson's Fellowship Of The New Life established in the previous year.¹⁵ The number of provincial groups established in response to the developments in London between 1880 and 1885 was not large. Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm has estimated that there were probably no more than two thousand organised socialists in England before 1888.¹⁶ Stanley Pierson has also estimated that by the same year the Social Democratic Federation had established more than forty branches with a membership of approximately one thousand.¹⁷ Stuart Macintyre has further calculated that during the nineteenth century membership of the

¹⁴ E. P. Thompson has called the Labour Emancipation League a 'halfway house' between radicalism and socialism. See his work William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary (1955). Pantheon Books, New York 1976. p. 285. In 1884 the Labour Emancipation League, led by Joseph Lane, affiliated with the newly re-named Social Democratic Federation. Later in the same year it left that body and supported the breakaway group, the Socialist League. See A. L. Morton & George Tate, The British Labour Movement 1770-1920. A History (1956). Lawrence & Wishart, London 1979. pp. 166-168.

¹⁵ For further information on the Fellowship of the New Life by one of its members, see Havelock Ellis, My Life William Heinemann, London 1940. Information on other members of the Fellowship can be found in: Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians. Quartet Books, London 1979; S. Rowbotham & J. Weeks, Socialism and the New Life and S. Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism

¹⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, Labour's Turning Point 1880-1900 (1948). Harvester Press, Brighton 1974. p. xxi.

¹⁷ S. Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism p. 69.

Social Democratic Federation never exceeded four thousand.¹⁸ It was this very smallness of numbers, however, which helps to explain why some individuals could exert considerable influence over the development of the socialist movement.

Two men in particular, William Morris, 1834-1896,¹⁹ and Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929,²⁰ stood above the rest as the prophets of the new life. Morris was already a well-known artist and writer by the time he joined Hyndman's Democratic Federation in January 1883. In his early years he was influenced by the writings of John Ruskin on art which stressed the connection between dignity in labour and the production of art. By the 1870s Morris had entered public political debate over the Eastern Question when he opposed Disraeli's policy of support for Turkish rule in the Balkans in the light of revelations of atrocities committed against the Christian population of Bulgaria. It was during this agitation that Morris began to regard the working class as in the vanguard politically. The seeds of his socialism, then, were planted long before he became a member of a socialist organisation. The basic tenet of his socialist philosophy - the acknowledgment of the connection between capitalism, which destroyed beauty and humanity through the indignity of wage labour, and the struggle of the working class - was forged during the 1860s and 1870s. By the end of 1884 Morris's personal and political differences with Henry Hyndman

¹⁸ Stuart Macintyre, A Proletarian Science. Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1986. p. 17.

¹⁹ The most illuminating discussion of William Morris's life and politics remains E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary.

²⁰ There exist several studies of Edward Carpenter. The most useful are: Chushichi Tsuzuki, Edward Carpenter 1844-1929. Prophet of Human Fellowship Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980; Sheila Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life', in S. Rowbotham & J. Weeks, Socialism and the New Life; and Sheila Rowbotham, 'In Search of Carpenter', in Sheila Rowbotham, Dreams and Dilemmas Virago, London 1983. A collection of sketches by Carpenter's contemporaries as a memorial to him is contained in Gilbert Beith, ed., Edward Carpenter In Appreciation, George Allen & Unwin, London 1931.

caused him, along with other prominent members of the Social Democratic Federation, as it had then become, such as Eleanor Marx,²¹ Edward Aveling²² and Ernest Belfort Bax,²³ to withdraw from the Federation and form their own group, the Socialist League.

Edward Carpenter's early life was conventional for a younger son of the professional middle-class. In the 1860s he became a lecturer at Cambridge University which at that time necessitated taking clerical orders. At about this time, also, he was introduced to the poetry of Walt Whitman where he found the celebration of male homosexuality linked with the desire for human liberation. From 1874 Carpenter became a lecturer for the University Extension Movement, which was designed to bring the benefits of higher education to the working class. As in the case of Morris, these experiences provided the basis for Carpenter's socialism. His disillusionment with established religion, his homosexuality and his increasing faith in the working class led to a socialist philosophy which celebrated the spiritual and physical love between people in opposition to Victorian bourgeois ideology which denied this unity between the spirit and the flesh. Carpenter first made contact with organised socialism through the Fellowship of the New Life, where he became acquainted with the South African novelist Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, the sexologist. Here he first heard of the existence of Hyndman's group of socialist agitators. It was the donation of

21 Eleanor Marx, 1855-1898, was the youngest of Karl Marx's three daughters. She eventually re-joined the Social Democratic Federation in 1896. The most comprehensive account of her life remains Yvonne Kapp, Eleanor Marx, 2 Vols. Virago, London 1979. See also Chushichi Tsuzuki, The Life of Eleanor Marx 1855-1898. A Socialist Tragedy. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1967.

22 Edward Aveling, 1849-1898, zoologist and botanist, lived with Eleanor Marx from 1884. An unflattering picture of him is presented in Y. Kapp, Eleanor Marx, Vol.2.

23 Ernest Belfort Bax, 1854-1926, was, with Morris, co-founder of the Socialist League. An analysis of his socialism can be found in S. Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism and in his article, 'Ernest Belfort Bax: 1854-1926. The Encounter of Marxism and Late Victorian Culture'. Journal of British Studies, Vol. 12, No.1, November 1972. Further information is contained in E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary.

£300 by Carpenter which launched Justice, the Federation's journal.²⁴ In 1885, after wavering between support for the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, he joined forces with Morris. Most of Carpenter's active political years were spent among the socialists in Sheffield where he lived from 1880.

Both Morris and Carpenter wrote of their hatred of contemporary civilisation, not only of its physical ugliness and squalor, but also of the spiritual bankruptcy which it induced in people. Towards the end of his life Morris explained 'How I Became a Socialist':

Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilisation...What shall I say concerning its mastery of, and its waste of mechanical power, its commonwealth so poor, its enemies of the commonwealth so rich, its stupendous organisation - for the misery of life? Its contempt of simple pleasures which everyone could enjoy but for its folly? Its eyeless vulgarity which has destroyed art, the one certain solace of labour?²⁵

Similarly Carpenter recalled:

It has not been...the belief in special constructive details as panaceas which has led me into the Socialist camp, so much as the fact that the movement has been a distinct challenge to the old order and a call to the rich and those in power to remodel society and their own lives; and that other fact that within the Socialist camp has burned that wonderful enthusiasm and belief in a new ideal of brotherhood.²⁶

From the first, then, their critique of capitalism and their dreams of a socialist society involved the reconstruction of a new society based upon altered personal relations between women and men and also upon the changed relationship between capitalist and worker. This was not, as some

²⁴ Edward Carpenter, My Days and Dreams. (1916). George Allen & Unwin, London 1921. p. 115. See also S. Rowbotham & J. Weeks, Socialism and the New Life, p. 44.

²⁵ How I Became a Socialist. A Series of Biographical Sketches (1894). Carl Silfenger, London 1978. p. 20.

²⁶ E.Carpenter, My Days and Dreams p. 128.

have assumed, through the description of Morris as a 'utopian' socialist, a rejection of Marxism,²⁷ but rather the recognition of the dialectical relationship between personal, and economic and social life.

Within both versions of the religious discourse of socialism, under the influence of Morris and Carpenter, there was frequently expressed a longing for unity in life. According to Belfort Bax:

Socialism is essentially neither religious nor irreligious, inasmuch as it re-affirms the unity of human life, abolishing the dualism which has lain at the foundation of all the great ethical religions. By this dualism I mean the antithesis of politics and religion, of the profane and the sacred, of matter and spirit...Hitherto the whole tendency of our society and thought has been to make of aspects of things, distinguishable if you will, but not legitimately separable, separate and more or less opposed principles.²⁸

John Bruce Glasier, a follower of Morris and later a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party, put it more simply: 'Socialism means not only the socialisation of wealth, but of our lives, our hearts - ourselves.'²⁹ The ideal of unity embodied in this discourse was explicitly opposed to the bourgeois values of liberalism which promulgated the ideology of a dichotomous society. It is not difficult here to recognise the appeal to women. For not only did it affirm a basic belief in equality between the sexes, it also denied the division between reason and passion - both hearts *and* minds were to be mobilised in the struggle for socialism. The impoverished portrayal of female subjectivity, a problematic element within feminism since the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, and a similarly

²⁷ See for example, S. Pierson, Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism p. 84. Pierson states that Morris 'expressed the idealistic outlook that Marx had attempted to exorcise by means of the dialectic'. See also E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary. Postscript, for a lively discussion of the various interpretations of Morris.

²⁸ Ernest Belfort Bax, 'Socialism and Religion'. Justice, Vol. 1, No. 23 June 21 1884 p. 2. BLHE 1880-1900.

²⁹ John Bruce Glasier, The Meaning of Socialism (1919) Independent Labour Party, London 1923. p. 170.

impoverished portrayal of male subjectivity inherent within gendered ideology, promised to be banished by this discourse. Through the works of Morris and Carpenter, then, and those of their followers, a conjunction was effected between the acknowledgement of the economic necessity for change and a profound disillusionment with Victorian bourgeois values. The emotional desire for freedom was thus linked with the economic urge for equality.

Morris's conversion to socialism and his recognition of the necessity of the class struggle were intimately connected with his views on art. In a series of lectures written between the late 1870s and his death in 1896, Morris frequently wrote about the state of art under capitalism. Art for Morris meant 'man's expression of his joy in labour',³⁰ and, as such, was interpreted by him in its widest possible sense to include all facets of social existence. The growth of commercialism, the introduction of new machinery and the increasing division of labour all involved the destruction of the relationship of the worker to the end product. For Morris there was an ineluctable connection between the loss of creative ability in the worker and the proletarianisation of the working class. With the growth of mass-produced artefacts beauty itself became degraded. This loss of beauty, he felt, had created a class who were so exploited that they were incapable of realising beauty in their own lives. The development of a capitalist industrial society and the destruction of art were therefore part of the same commercial process whereby human lives and values were devalued. Thus the reinstatement of art in people's lives necessitated the destruction of capitalism.

If art which is now sick is to live and not die; it must in the future be of the people for the people and by the people; it must understand all and be

³⁰ William Morris, 'Art Under Plutocracy'. (1883). The Collected Works Of William Morris. 24 Volumes. Longman's, Green & Co., London 1910-1915. Vol. XXIII, p.173.

understood by all: equality must be the answer to tyranny: if that be not attained, art will die.³¹

It was at this stage in his life, in 1881, that Morris came to recognise the necessity of the class struggle.

For between us and that which is to be, if art is not to perish utterly, there is something alive and devouring; something as it were a river of fire that will put all that tries to swim across to a hard proof indeed, and scare from the plunge every soul that is not made fearless by desire of truth and insight of happy days to come beyond.³²

This relationship between the class struggle - the 'river of fire' - and the re-birth of art and beauty in people's lives formed the basis of the new society as depicted by Morris in News From Nowhere, the utopian novel which portrays his vision of life after the revolution has occurred, and was written as a response to the American Edward Bellamy's novel Looking Backwards which was published in 1888.³³ The book describes the journey of the 'Guest', as he is called, who falls asleep after having attended a Socialist League discussion on 'the Morrow of the Revolution' and awakens to find himself in the twenty-first century after the revolution has occurred. In this book Morris's beliefs on art, socialism, the position of women and parliamentary politics are drawn together to provide not only an extensive critique of capitalist society but also a picture of what it was possible for people to achieve. Whilst News From Nowhere can easily be interpreted as the desire for the establishment of an arcadian ideal with its

³¹ William Morris, 'The Prospects of Architecture in Civilisation', (1881). Collected Works Vol.XXII, p.133.

³² *Ibid.* p.131.

³³ News From Nowhere was first published January to October 1890 in The Commonwealth. Reprinted in Three Works By William Morris Lawrence & Wishart, London 1968. Bellamy's book envisaged, in the form of state socialism, a gentle transition from capitalism to socialism. Morris's book, on the other hand, made it explicit that the transition was bloody and revolutionary.

emphasis upon rural and traditional crafts, it must be read against the background of his earlier lectures on socialism.

In the manifesto of the Socialist League which was written by Morris in 1885, and later annotated by both Morris and Bax, he spoke of the necessity for 'single-hearted devotion to the religion of socialism, the only religion which the Socialist League professes'.³⁴ Socialism for Morris meant:

emphatically not merely 'a system of property-holding', but a complete theory of human life, founded indeed on the visible necessities of animal life, but including a distinct system of religion, ethics and conduct, which... will not indeed enable us to get rid of the tragedy of life... but will enable us to meet it without fear and without shame.³⁵

Morris defined three qualities or conditions which had to be acquired before the socialist society could be attained: 'Intelligence enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel'.³⁶ Without these qualities, without the conscious desire for a new life, the class struggle in his view became simply a means without an end and would necessarily fall victim to 'a kind of utilitarian sham socialism'.³⁷ It was precisely this form of 'utilitarian' socialism depicted by Bellamy in Looking Backwards which Morris had set out to counter in News From Nowhere. Hence the task for Morris, and by extension the Socialist League, was to go out to the working class and arouse in ordinary men and women the desire for a different society based upon equality.

I say that for us to make Socialists is the business at present, and at present I do not think we can have any other useful business. Those who are not really Socialists - who are Trades Unionists, disturbance-

³⁴ Reprinted in E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary, pp. 732-740. Especially p. 737.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.548.

³⁶ William Morris, 'Communism', (1883). Collected Works Vol. XXIII. p.266.

³⁷ William Morris, 'Facing the Worst Of It'. Commonweal, February 19th, 1887. BLHE 1880-1900.

breeders, or what not - will do what they are impelled to do, and we cannot help it. At the worst there will be some good in what they do; but we need not and cannot heartily work with them, when we know that their methods are beside the right way.³⁸

Morris's words, spoken in 1890, prefigured elements within the Socialist League which were later to lead to its takeover by anarchists and ultimate disintegration.³⁹ These elements were the rejection of trades unionism as a vehicle for spreading the socialist word among the working class and the refusal to co-operate with the formation of the Independent Labour Party.⁴⁰ Propaganda, not reformist measures, was seen as the key to converting the working class to socialism.

Morris was wary of merely piecemeal reforms because he believed that in the desire for the immediate amelioration of glaring inequalities the deeper and more hidden inequalities could be lost forever. He believed further that the state would agree to limited reforms in an attempt to render the socialist movement bankrupt of its revolutionary content:

[G]reat as the gain would be, the ultimate good of it, the amount of progressive force that might be in such things would, I think, depend on how such reforms were done - in what spirit; or rather what else was being done, while these were going on, which would make the people long for equality of condition; which would give them faith in the possibility and workableness of Socialism...The question then, it seems to me, about all these partial gains...is not so much as to what advantage they may be to the public at large in the passing moment, or even to the working

³⁸ William Morris, 'Where We Are Now', Commonweal, November 15th 1890. Reprinted in May Morris, William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist. Vol 2. Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1936. pp. 517-518.

³⁹ For a detailed description of the factors surrounding the League's slide into anarchism and its eventual disintegration see E. P. Thompson, William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary. pp. 549-552 & pp. 559-579. See also S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life'. pp. 61-63.

⁴⁰ This conflict, between independence and alliance, which was fought specifically over the trade union movement and over the formation of the Independent Labour Party, and which can be seen here as latent within the early works of Morris is the subject of the following chapter.

people, but rather what effect they will have towards converting the workers to an understanding of, and ardent desire for Socialism...For I want to know and to ask you to consider, how far the betterment of the working people might go and yet stop at last without having made any progress on the direct road to Communism. Whether in short the tremendous organisation of civilised commercial society is not playing the cat and mouse game with us Socialists. Whether the Society of Inequality might not accept the quasi-socialist machinery above mentioned, and work it for the purpose of upholding that society in a somewhat shorn condition, maybe, but a safe one.⁴¹

Morris's sense of the power of the state and particularly its ability to adapt to, and thereby diminish the strength of, the demands of workers was in marked contrast to those, such as the Fabians, who perceived the state as a neutral force in society.⁴² Edward Carpenter later recalled:

No doubt the forces of reaction - the immense apathy of the masses, the immense resistance of the official and privileged classes, entrenched behind the Law and the State, and the immense and growing power of Money - were things not then fully realized and understood. There seemed a great hope for the realization of Morris' dream - and we most of us shared in it. But History is a difficult horse to drive.⁴³

Carpenter wrote these words during the First World War when hopes for an international and indigenous socialist movement seemed forlorn. Morris, on the other hand, was writing before the formation of the Labour Party; at a time when there was a struggle over what kind of socialism should prevail. But history was not only to prove to be a 'difficult horse to drive', it also left a legacy which proved difficult to overcome, as Morris demonstrated in his writings on women.

Morris's policy of independence from all existing political institutions and working-class organisations had implications for his views on feminism

⁴¹ W. Morris, 'Communism', pp. 265-267.

⁴² The Fabian attitude toward the state is discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

⁴³ E. Carpenter, My Days and Dreams p. 125.

and feminist organisations. In News From Nowhere and other works, there exists an ambiguity concerning the position of women which suggests that Morris was ultimately unable to reconcile the tension between a belief in gender difference with that also of equality. Although in News From Nowhere, Morris stressed that all occupations were to be freely chosen and equally valued, he depicted women as naturally inclined towards housework and, moreover, argued that women's 'natural' maternal instinct would be more strongly expressed after the revolution.⁴⁴

How could it possibly be but that maternity should be honoured amongst us? Surely it is a matter of course that the natural and necessary pains which the mother must go through form a bond of union between man and woman, an extra stimulus to love and affection between them, and that this is universally recognised...the ordinarily healthy woman...respected as a child-bearer and rearer of children, desired as a woman, loved as a companion, unanxious for the future of her children, has far more instinct for maternity than the poor drudge and mother of drudges of past days could ever have had.⁴⁵

In part Morris's polemic represented an undisguised attack upon those feminists, such as Josephine Butler, who were arguing that women constituted a sex-class, whereby their common oppression as a gender over-rode economic class differences. In part also, it was an exposure of gendered ideology which had devalued such important functions as childbirth. Nevertheless, Morris's hostility to piecemeal reforms and any form of collaboration with existing institutions, evidenced in his attitude towards trade unionism and his stress upon independence over alliance for socialists,⁴⁶ ran contrary to feminist claims for immediate reforms such as the right to higher education, entry into the professions and, pre-eminently, the right to vote. This strategical gap between feminist and socialist goals

⁴⁴ W. Morris, News From Nowhere p. 241-242.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 242-243.

⁴⁶ By 1893, however, Morris had changed his views with regard to trade unionism.

prefigured a tendency within some sections of the socialist movement which later became explicit in the first decade of the twentieth century during the intensive suffrage campaigns, whereby the claims of feminists were perceived as secondary to the class struggle.⁴⁷ Morris's perception of women in terms of maternity and the family, although couched in liberatory language, prefigured a further tendency within socialism and feminism, which also became most apparent in the first decade of the twentieth century. This tendency, enthusiastically adopted by the later Labour Party and the Women's Labour League in particular, was that of conducting campaigns for women's rights - including that of the suffrage - on the basis of motherhood.⁴⁸

In his work on women Morris exhibited the tensions between difference and equality concerning what was to be the role of women in the future society. His work also revealed the ambiguous inheritance bequeathed to socialists when using religious discourse as a rallying point for recruitment to the movement. For religious language could be both conservative and radical. Nevertheless, by opposing the duality of Victorian ideology and asserting instead the unity of reason and passion through a change of consciousness which linked human emotions to political aspirations, Morris attempted to transcend the problems inherent for a socialist with the late nineteenth century women's movement which argued for women's emancipation as a sex-class. However, by portraying women as best fitted for the domestic role, as he did in News From Nowhere, Morris re-affirmed the sexual division of labour on the basis of reproductive functions. Through

⁴⁷ This attitude was particularly strong within the Social Democratic Federation and Harry Quelch, one of the more prominent members of the Federation, was to a large extent responsible for the Labour Party's failure to adopt the principle of votes for women on the same basis as it was granted to men until 1912. See Chapter Five for a full discussion of this issue.

⁴⁸ The debates on motherhood conducted within the Women's Labour League and other women's political groups are the subject of Chapter Six.

his assertion that feminists proposed inclusion in the public world at the expense of maternity,⁴⁹ Morris himself perpetuated the androcentric dichotomy between the public and private spheres. The destruction of the negative portrayal of feminine subjectivity promised by this religious discourse of socialism which expounded the belief in freedom and equality and the recognition for a changed consciousness ultimately foundered over the issue of reproduction.

The emancipation of women was only rarely made explicit within the works of Morris. E. P. Thompson has suggested the reason for this was that Morris was anxious to tread a wary path between the advocates of free love such as Joseph Lane of the Labour Emancipation League and the outright misogyny of some of his fellow socialists such as Belfort Bax.⁵⁰ But, as the above remarks indicate, there is evidence to suggest that Morris did not consider the emancipation of women as primary but, rather, as subsumed within the more general struggle for freedom and equality. Nevertheless, in occasional works, Morris stated quite clearly that the position of women would be considerably altered in the new society. In the manifesto of the Socialist League he wrote:

Under a Socialistic system contracts between individuals would be voluntary and unenforced by the community. This would apply to the marriage contract as well as others, and it would become a matter of simple inclination. Women also would share in the certainty of livelihood which would be the lot of all.⁵¹

⁴⁹ W. Morris, News From Nowhere p. 242.

⁵⁰ E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic To Revolutionary p.705.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.740.

This point was expanded upon later by Morris and Bax in their book Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome.⁵² Here they talk briefly of the abolition of the family as it existed under capitalism. Whilst following Engel's analysis of the family as the result of the accumulation of private property,⁵³ Morris and Bax went further and exposed the somewhat paradoxical position the family held under capitalism. They argued that whilst the family served to reinforce capitalist ideology with an emphasis on individualism, freedom and equality, at the same time its very structure militated against the highly socialised workforce needed for capitalist production. It was to preserve unity in the face of these two contradictory elements that the notion of the family as a haven from the world outside was fostered. As they wrote:

the family professes to exist as affording us a haven of calm and restful affection and the humanising influences of mutual help and consideration, but it ignores quietly its real reason for existence, its real aim, namely, protection for individualist property by means of inheritance, and a nucleus for resistance to the outside world, whether that take the form of other families or the public weal, such as it may be.⁵⁴

Under this system, the family served to hide the fact that 'the so-called morality of the present age is simply commercial necessity, masquerading in the forms of Christian ethics'.⁵⁵ With the establishment of a socialist society, however:

a new development of the family would take place, on the basis, not of a pre-determined life-long business arrangement, to be formally and nominally held to, irrespective of circumstances, but on mutual

⁵² W. Morris & E. Belfort Bax, Socialism Its Growth and Outcome, Kerr & Co., New York 1912. First published as a series of articles entitled 'Socialism from the Root Up' in Commonweal 1886-1887.

⁵³ Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884). International Publishers, New York 1972. Chapter 2.

⁵⁴ W. Morris and E. Belfort Bax, Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome pp.11-12.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.13.

inclination and affection, an association terminable at the will of either party...For the abhorrence of the oppression of the man by the woman or the woman by the man (both of which continually happen to-day under the aegis of our would-be moral institutions) will certainly be an essential outcome of the ethics of the New Society.⁵⁶

Morris' and Bax's work on marriage and the family, making it the legitimate subject of political concern, echoed the earlier work of Robert Owen and the Owenites.⁵⁷ But, as Barbara Taylor has argued in relation to those earlier socialists, present realities could be overlooked in favour of future hopes.⁵⁸ In other words, the socialists' stress upon freedom within relationships could mean libertinism for men but greater sexual oppression for women. As will be discussed later in this chapter, sexuality and sexual freedom was to prove just as problematic for socialist women in the late nineteenth century.

Morris's works and those written with Belfort Bax display a curious reluctance to specifically discuss the issue of women's emancipation and how precisely this was to be achieved. According to Morris's daughter May this can be explained in part by the fact that:

Bax had a positive dread of Woman, as a growing World-force, and would show his comprehensive dislike of the sex by crowing over any occurrences that seemed to him to tell against it. "Woman" and the

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.226.

⁵⁷ See, for example, 'What is Socialism? And what would be its practical effects upon Society? A correct report of the public discussion between Robert Owen and Mr. John Brindley.' (1841). The Rational System - Seven Pamphlets 1837-1841, Arno Press, New York 1972. Pamphlet 5. Robert Owen argued: 'Single-family arrangements carry in their nature a direct opposition and competition with all other family arrangements. I am for uniting the human race. Everyone is trained naturally now to say, "my wife, my house, my child, my everything". This all creates selfish feelings; I say this creates to a very great extent, unnatural and selfish feelings.' p. 51.

⁵⁸ B. Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem, p. 207.

"nineteenth century Family" and "nineteenth century Religion" were his three bugbears.⁵⁹

Precisely to what extent Bax influenced Morris on this issue is difficult to gauge. As News From Nowhere demonstrated, Morris was not above poking fun at contemporary feminists in the manner of Bax.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Morris's vision of the new society, based as it was upon freedom and equality, did inspire many women as Hannah Mitchell, a socialist and suffragette, later testified.⁶¹

It could be argued that Morris's writings on women and the family were at their strongest when describing the future society rather than analysing how this society was to be achieved. In 1889 he delivered a lecture, which was sponsored by the Fabian Society, entitled 'How Shall We Live Then?', where he discussed what forms of art, that is, labour, would be performed under a socialist society. On the question of the domestic arts which included marketing, cleaning, cooking, baking, sewing and embroidery, he stated:

Once more whoever was incapable of taking interest and a share in some parts of such work would have to be considered diseased; and the

⁵⁹ M. Morris, William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist Vol. 2. p. 174. When a paper reported that a woman had fallen from the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol and survived: 'Bax's comment was triumphant: she was the lower organism; man, the higher animal, would have been killed'. Bax's hostility towards women never abated throughout his life. In 1912, reviewing his book, Problems of Men, Mind and Morals, Rebecca West challenged Bax's argument that: 'women at present constitute an almost boundlessly privileged section of the community. A woman may, in the present day, do practically what she likes without fear of anything happening to her beyond a nominal punishment' by suggesting that he dress up as a woman and commit the offences the suffragettes were committing and experience the consequences for himself. Jane Marcus, ed., The Young Rebecca. Writings of Rebecca West 1911-1917, Virago, London 1982. p. 36.

⁶⁰ W. Morris, News From Nowhere, pp. 240-242.

⁶¹ Hannah Mitchell, The Hard Way Up, Virago, London 1977. p. 116.

existence of many such diseased persons would tend to the enslavement of the weaker sex.⁶²

However, this recognition of women's oppression through their unpaid domestic labour, and the acknowledgment that such work should be performed equally by both sexes, made reference to practical activity only. It did not counter the belief that maternity was women's 'natural' role.

The difficulties encountered by Morris in his writings on women were not simply a reflection of the world in which he lived which rigorously separated female and male functions - although, of course, this was an important factor. They also reveal the limitations placed upon theories of liberation within a society in which ideology and material existence had become radically separated. This was the point Josephine Butler had been making in her campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts; that whilst the direct victims of this legislation were working-class women, it exposed the fact that all women, regardless of their class status, were victims of the same male contempt for womanhood and that the notion of a world divided into two separate spheres was a fiction.

William Morris has been criticised by many historians for being a 'utopian' socialist, the last great exponent of the romantic ideal in nineteenth century England.⁶³ Yet his vision of the future, as portrayed in News From Nowhere, which was not intended to be prescriptive, had its basis in historical materialism, that is to say, in the historical relationship of the worker to the mode of production. As he stated in a lecture in 1885 entitled 'The Hopes of Civilisation':

the capitalist or modern slave-owner has been forced by his very success... to organise his slaves, the wage earners, into a co-operation

⁶² Paul Meier, 'An Unpublished Lecture of William Morris'. International Review of Social History, Vol 16, 1971, p.230.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of these criticisms and a spirited defence of Morris's socialism see E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary pp.763-816.

for production so well arranged that it requires little but his own elimination to make it a foundation for communal life: in the teeth also of the experience of past ages, he has been compelled to allow a modicum of education to the propertyless, and has not even been able to deprive them wholly of political rights; his own advance in wealth and power has bred for him the very enemy who is doomed to make an end of him.⁶⁴

Crossing the 'river of fire', that is, recognising the necessity of the class struggle, was of paramount importance for Morris.

The strength and attraction of Morris's work lay in his constant belief in the necessity of a full theoretical understanding of socialism amongst the working class and his repeated emphasis upon the need for a change of consciousness. By these means Morris was able to expose some of the false dichotomies inherent within gendered ideology. Yet Morris's socialism, was itself the product of both historical tradition and his own historical context, which was reflected in his views on women. For whilst Morris envisaged an equal future society for women and men alike, he did so in androcentric terms by regarding motherhood as women's greatest career and by denigrating aspects of the women's movement which advocated careers for women at the expense of motherhood.⁶⁵ In so doing, Morris, whether knowingly or otherwise, appeared to be replicating social Darwinist ideas concerning women.⁶⁶ Like those earlier socialists of the nineteenth century, Morris's socialism was inspirational and yet, like them he, too, was caught on the horns of the dilemma between difference and equality.

Edward Carpenter, the other great exponent of the liberatory version of the religious discourse of socialism, was deeply influenced by the ideas of

⁶⁴ William Morris, 'The Hopes of Civilisation'. (1885). Collected Works Vol. XXIII. p.76.

⁶⁵ For an analysis of the use of motherhood as an attack upon feminism, and the later incorporation of motherhood in a 'new feminism' see Sheila Jeffreys, The Spinster and Her Enemies. Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930. Pandora, London 1985. pp. 134-146.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of social Darwinism as it affected women see Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood'. History Workshop Journal. Issue 5. Spring 1978. pp. 9-65. See also Jane Lewis, Women in England 1870-1950 Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex 1984. pp. 81-83.

Morris, 'because away and beyond the scientific forecast he gave expression to the emotional presentment and ideal of a sensible free human brotherhood - as in John Ball or News From Nowhere'.⁶⁷ Like Morris, Carpenter came from a comfortable middle-class background, and it was this very background which propelled him towards socialism, for he saw that movement as 'a distinct challenge to the old order and a call to the rich and those in power to remodel society and their own lives'.⁶⁸ The capitalist state, he felt, had not only produced a corrupt economic system but had also produced a profoundly corrupt moral system.

At the bottom, and behind all the elaborations of economic science, theories of social progress, the changing forms of production, and class warfare, lies to-day the fact that the old ideals of society have become corrupt, and that this corruption has resulted in dishonesty of life.⁶⁹

Carpenter believed that the late-Victorian expectations of social behaviour forced men, and in particular those of the middle class, to hide their true feelings. The effect of capitalist society upon man, he declared, had been 'to draw him away namely, (1) from Nature, (2) from his true Self, (3) from his Fellows',⁷⁰ whilst the self-same system had resulted in the enslavement of women:

Woman is a slave, and must remain so as long as ever our present domestic system is maintained, I say that our average mode of life, as conceived under the bourgeois ideal of society, cannot be kept up without perpetuating the slavery of woman.⁷¹

⁶⁷ E. Carpenter, My Days And Dreams p.216.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.128

⁶⁹ Edward Carpenter, England's Ideal. Swan Sonnenschein, London 1887. p.1.

⁷⁰ Edward Carpenter, Civilisation. Its Cause And Cure Swan Sonnenschein, London 1891. p.27

⁷¹ E. Carpenter, England's Ideal p. 86.

Extrapolating from his own experiences as a boy growing up in a household with many sisters, he condemned that system which alienated men from each other and forced women into a life of vacuity, relieved only by marriage and childbirth.⁷²

Like many socialists before and after him, Carpenter's experiences led him to believe that there existed within everyone a longing for the ideal of human unity which had been suppressed by Victorian bourgeois ideology and by established religion.

The pure beautiful relation of humanity, the most sacred thing in all this world, is betrayed at every step; and Christianity with its message of human love, Democracy with its magnificent conception of inward and sacramental human equality, can only be cherished by him in the hidden interior of his being; they can have no real abiding place in his outward life.⁷³

It was this hidden, truer human nature which needed to be uncovered and consciously striven for in order for people to achieve the spiritual growth necessary for the new life. Carpenter, like Morris, saw a change of consciousness as pivotal in this process.

Whilst Carpenter closely followed Morris's ideal of human unity, in two areas, those of women's emancipation and sexual freedom, he made explicit what was often merely implicit or ambiguous in Morris's work. His analysis of the stultifying effects of the capitalist system upon human relations led him further to reject contemporary notions of sexuality, a subject which Morris had been loath to discuss. His final acceptance of his own homosexuality, after many years of questioning, drew Carpenter to a recognition of the sexual, as well as economic, oppression that pertained within capitalist industrial society. From this perspective he was able to reach some understanding of the tyranny of fixed gender roles whereby

⁷² E. Carpenter, My Days And Dreams pp. 30-33.

⁷³ E. Carpenter, England's Ideal p.8.

women were trained for economic, social and emotional dependence, whilst men were trained for an independent competitive life which involved denying their emotions and disguising their true feelings. Evidence of this denial, he wrote, could be seen in the way men treated women, other races, and the working class.

So it comes about that the men who have the sway of the world to-day are in the most important matters quite ungrown...It is certainly very maddening at times to think that the Destinies of the world, the organisation of society, the wonderful scope of possible statemanship, the mighty issues of trade and industry, the loves of Women, the lives of criminals, the fate of savage nations, should be in the hands of...men, to whom it seems quite natural that our marriage and social institutions should lumber along over the bodies of women, as our commercial institutions grind over the bodies of the poor, and our 'imperial' enterprise over the bodies of barbarian races, destroyed by drink and devilry...Assuredly it is no wonder that the more go-ahead women (who have come round to the light by their own way, and through much darkness and suffering) should rise in revolt; or that the Workmen (finding their lives in the hands of those who do not know what life is) should do the same.⁷⁴

By linking imperialism, industrialisation and the oppression of women with the manner in which males were reared, Carpenter recognised the extent to which gendered ideology penetrated all aspects of social existence and was, moreover, intrinsic to the functioning of civil society. It was in order to overcome all these oppressive relations, the sexual as well as the economic, that Carpenter posited a future state of existence which was based upon freedom and equality.

Because he believed that the relations between the sexes had been perverted by the growth of capitalism, Carpenter looked forward to the day when the ideal society would be founded. This new society would be based upon co-operation; men and women would be free from sexual stereotyping

⁷⁴ Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming Of Age*. (1896). George Allen & Unwin, London 1913. pp30-31.

and hence enabled to combine the best characteristics of each sex. An inkling of this future society, he believed, could already be seen in people whom he referred to as 'Urnings', that is, homosexuals.

[T]here are some remarkable and (we think) indispensable types of character, in whom there is such a union or balance of the feminine and masculine qualities that these people become to a great extent the interpreters of men and women to each other.⁷⁵

He continued: 'it is possible that they may have an important part to play in the evolution of the race.'⁷⁶ The androgynous society was seen by Carpenter as the solution to sexual and economic oppression because he believed that the socialisation of women and men into fixed gender roles trained men to dominate and women to be submissive. A combination of the characteristics of each sex would make men less competitive and women more independent and thereby both class and gender oppression would be abolished.

In attempting to abolish gender divisions, then, Carpenter replaced them with the vision of a united human, the 'urning', whose homosexuality he believed was innate and not acquired:

too much emphasis cannot be laid on the distinction between these born lovers of their own kind, and that class of persons, with whom they are so often confused, who out of mere carnal curiosity or extravagance of desire, or from the dearth of opportunities for a more normal satisfaction...adopt some homosexual practices.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.115.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.121.

⁷⁷ Edward Carpenter, The Intermediate Sex (1908). Edward Carpenter. Selected Writings. Volume 1: Sex. GMP Publishers, London 1984. p. 208. Similarly, Edith Lees, herself a lesbian, wrote: 'mock abnormality is a great danger to the State, and it is a growing one. By mock abnormality I mean an attitude towards passion experiments and episodes outside normal lines merely of self-gratification. Indulgence for the sake of indulgence, either in the ranks of the normal or the abnormal, is, in the light of modern ethics, a shame and a disgrace, and it is the nearest approach to sensual sin we can imagine.' The New Horizon in Love and Life A. & C. Black, London 1921. p. 60.

But by making homosexuality an innate characteristic Carpenter thus substituted one system of biological determinism for another. It is important to remember, however, that as a result of the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 all male homosexual activity became punishable by law.⁷⁸ It was not possible, therefore, for Carpenter to openly advocate homosexuality as a sexual practice.

There were some important constraints to Carpenter's ideal of androgyny. Firstly, his writings were coloured by the fact that he was a middle-class male whose emotional life was orientated towards other males. This inevitably meant that his main emphasis was on the crippling effects of notions of masculinity embodied within gendered ideology. As a result of this, Carpenter was often contradictory when analysing the social construction of femininity and, indeed, he himself at times accepted contemporary definitions of what constituted womanhood. Thus he said of lesbians and feminists in general:

The women of the new movement are naturally largely drawn from those in whom the maternal instinct is not especially strong; and also from those in whom the sexual instinct is not preponderant. Such women do not altogether represent their sex; some are rather mannish in temperament; some are 'homogenic', that is, inclined to attachments to their own, rather than to the opposite, sex; some are ultra-rationalising and brain-cultured.⁷⁹

'Masculine' and 'feminine' are taken as given by Carpenter, although he gave the definition of 'masculine' behaviour far greater flexibility than he did 'feminine'. Hence, women who break out of the bourgeois mould are seen as

⁷⁸ See Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800. Longmans, London 1981. p. 102. Until 1861, when the Offences Against The Person Act was passed, buggery carried with it the death penalty but 'gross Indecency', which effectively covered all sexual activity between two men, was the misdemeanour introduced by Labouchere. *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ E. Carpenter, Love's Coming of Age p.66.

behaving in a 'mannish' way, even though he had spoken earlier of the need for women to become less submissive. But the men who break out of the mould, and he was himself a prime example of this, are not subject to the same criticism. In his own life, the intrusion of men into what was seen as exclusively female territory, such as in their ability to show their love for each other and their talent for housework, was considered to be the means for extending and enriching the male person.⁸⁰ Indeed, Sheila Rowbotham has argued that the 'extent to which Carpenter and his friends could present a challenge to domestic relationships was reduced because its intensity was limited to one sex'.⁸¹

Carpenter tended to privilege nature (which he sometimes referred to as 'evolution') as the mechanism whereby the human race would progress towards freedom and equality. But his work on sexuality, in particular, illustrates the political ambiguity of language itself, how the meaning of language is transformed according to the speaker. His theories were at one and the same time both revolutionary and reactionary. They were revolutionary to the extent that he gave sexuality primacy in the struggle for the new life. They were reactionary in that they were predicated upon biological determinism. Carpenter's work was imbued with the language of the new sexologists, such as Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, but it also was part of a continuum of ideas regarding sexuality within socialism going back to the 1830s. As the editor of the journal The Shepherd⁸² James Smith, an Owenite, had produced within its pages a new theory of 'Universalism'. According to Smith, who had in his turn been influenced by

⁸⁰ E. Carpenter, My Days And Dreams pp162-163.

⁸¹ S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life' p. 94.

⁸² James Smith had been an editor of the Owenite journal the Crisis until he clashed with Owen over the issue of trades unionism. The Shepherd ran from 1834-1835 and 1837-1838. See J. F. C. Harrison, Quest for the New Moral World. Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America Scribners, New York 1969. p. 114.

the ideas of the French socialists, the Saint-Simonians, the triumph of the spirit would occur when masculine intellectualism was allied with feminine moralism, thus creating a new race of women and men.⁸³ But despite the fact that Carpenter's theories of gender were grounded in biology, by stressing the simultaneous transformation of both women and men he attempted to transcend the feminist problematic of difference and equality, upon which Morris's ideas had foundered. As Susan Kent has argued in relation to the feminists of the nineteenth century, so, too, can Carpenter's analysis be seen as a "reverse discourse" whereby the new scientific language of sexuality was appropriated by him to present a positive and compassionate portrayal of homosexuality.⁸⁴

But, like Morris, Carpenter's theories regarding women's emancipation revealed their full contradiction over the issue of motherhood, which in Carpenter's case exhibited itself through a belief in the spiritual essentialism of sexual categories.

If it should turn out that a certain fraction of the feminine sex should for one reason or another not devote itself to the work of maternity, still the influence of this section would react on the others to render their notion of motherhood far more dignified than before. There is not much doubt that in the future this most important of human labours will be carried on with a degree of conscious intelligence hitherto unknown, and such as will raise it from the fulfilment of a mere instinct to the completion of a splendid social purpose. To save the souls of children as well as their bodies, to raise heroic as well as prosperous citizens, will surely be the desire and the work of the mothers of our race.⁸⁵

Similarly, Beatrice Webb, of the Fabian Society, who according to Jeffrey Weeks: 'rejected, for various reasons, individual motherhood, could easily

⁸³ B. Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem, pp. 167-172.

⁸⁴ See Susan Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914 Routledge, London 1990. pp. 14-16. See also J. Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society, p. 19.

⁸⁵ E. Carpenter, Love's Coming of Age pp. 66-67.

accept the notion of "racial motherhood", particularly given the expanding opportunities for women in health and social administration.⁸⁶ It could be argued that by giving motherhood, or the maternal spirit, a social role as well as a biological role, Carpenter was thereby able to transcend the tensions between difference and equality. In this respect, his ideas were strikingly similar to those feminists, such as Millicent Garret Fawcett, who argued for the vote for women on the basis of their maternal spirit and saw this as a means of changing the nature of politics overall. Nevertheless, like Morris before him, Carpenter ultimately determined women's social existence on the basis of their biological functions, for even those who chose not to bear children were seen as imbued with a natural instinct for motherhood - the qualities of caring and nurturance - which they would take with them into the public world.

Carpenter's analysis of sex roles was also constrained by the problem of class. For his vision of an androgynous society and the ability of the individual to uncover hidden feelings and live out a new spiritual relationship with the world could only be achieved by those with independent financial resources. Indeed, for many years, Carpenter's own experimentation with a more simple life in the country was only possible because it was supported by the labour of working-class women and men who cooked and cleaned for him and helped him to become self-sufficient in his garden.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Carpenter's advocacy of the 'simplification of life',⁸⁸ an idea which was derived from the men who were the major

⁸⁶ J. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 128. It is pertinent here to note that all those who spoke of 'race motherhood', such as Beatrice Webb, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence of the Women's Social and Political Union, and Katharine Bruce Glasier were middle-class. After having experienced child-birth once Hannah Mitchell resolved 'to bring no more babies into the world. I felt it impossible to face again either the personal suffering, or the task of bringing a second child up in poverty.' *The Hard Way Up*, p. 102.

⁸⁷ E. Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* Chapter IX.

⁸⁸ E. Carpenter, *England's Ideal*, p.59.

influences upon his own philosophy, such as Morris, Whitman and Thoreau, made sense only in middle-class context. In a working-class household, the addition of carpets on the floors and wallpapers on the walls would not be seen as the trappings and unnecessary clutter of a corrupt society but comforts which had been earned by hard work. Moreover, tinting walls and polishing floors did not obviate the need for hard work.

It is important to remember, though, that at the time Carpenter was formulating his philosophy, ideas about the social construction of gender were unknown. Certainly, he had recognised that women and men were socialised into their gender roles, but at the same time his analysis was grounded in the belief that some characteristics were fixed, hence his view of homosexuals as pointing the way to an androgynous future. What Carpenter had failed to do was distinguish between sex as a biological fact, and gender as a social construct and thus he, too, was ultimately unable to transcend the problematic of difference and equality. But in spite of the fact that his analyses remained, to a large extent, bounded by the conventions of hegemonic Victorian values, Carpenter tried, in his own life, to cross the divides of both sex and class at a time when these divisions were rigidly observed. Through his work women especially, particularly those who were well-educated and felt constrained by gendered ideology, such as Olive Schreiner and Kate Salt, were brought into contact with a philosophy which decreed that there was nothing 'natural' about the sexual division of labour and thus offered them at least the possibility of a life with new dimensions.⁸⁹

We see no reason indeed why he [the husband] should not assist in some part of the domestic work, and thus contribute his share of labour and intelligence to the conduct of the house; nor why the woman - being

⁸⁹ For a discussion of the relationship between Carpenter and Schreiner and the Salt family see C. Tsuzuki, Edward Carpenter. Prophet of Human Fellowship. For working-class women in Sheffield who were similarly inspired by his work and its general impact see S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life', pp. 120-123.

thus relieved - should not occasionally, and when desirable, find salaried work outside, and so contribute to the maintenance of the family, and to her own security and sense of independence. The over-differentiation of the labours of the sexes to-day is at once a perpetuation of the servitude of women and a cause of misunderstanding between her and man, and of lack of interest in each others' doings.⁹⁰

Carpenter, like Engels, thought that the enslavement of women and the degradation of the working class were a result of the accumulation of private property. But, unlike Engels, Carpenter recognised that an economic change of itself would not necessarily free women. There had to be a moral revolution as well which would allow women complete freedom both economically and sexually. Freedom and equality which had come 'to control all my thought and expression',⁹¹ were for Carpenter the twin foundations of the ideal society.

The perception of socialism as a new religion, as a new cultural practice, as stated earlier exhibited itself in two quite different, yet inter-related, ways. It could, and did, lead to sexual radicalism, a strand of socialism which stretched back to the era of the Owenites; for the connections made between personal and political life led some to an analysis of sexual relationships and sexuality itself. As Carpenter wrote: 'if a betterment of conditions was the main thing sought for, it was a betterment of social life and a satisfaction of the needs of the heart fully as much as an increased allowance of bread and butter.'⁹² Writing at a time when the impetus was for greater state involvement in the area of personal life, Carpenter made the radical connection between personal and economic liberation.

⁹⁰ E. Carpenter, Love's Coming Of Age pp59-60.

⁹¹ Quoted in S. Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896'. p.14.

⁹² E. Carpenter, My Days and Dreams p. 129.

The identification of socialism as a new religion led to another, more morally conservative, development. A brief examination of the life of Caroline Martyn, one of the early martyrs for the movement, gives us an instance of this. Born in Lincoln in 1867, Caroline Martyn died, exhausted by her non-stop travelling and lecturing for the cause, twenty-nine years later in July 1896. In a letter to her mother she attempted to reassure her as to what she meant by socialism.

My dear mother, you must rest satisfied that I shall never identify myself with Anarchists and Revolutionaries. All my Socialism I learnt, in the first place, in its broad outlines from the New Testament, and my only motive for endeavouring to propagate my views is the belief that they are practical Christianity. As Socialists, we come into contact with the scum and off-scouring of the earth in our pursuit of duty, but then we do not consort (for lack of power) with the sinners and harlots whom Jesus came to seek and to save, and among whom He spent His life. We are in the world of coarseness and sin and horror - but not of it. Many of the Socialists are not Christians - they say the two things are incompatible.⁹³

Martyn's letter reveals a crucial difference between the two versions of the religious discourse of socialism. The first, discussed above in the context of the work of Morris and Carpenter, whatever its limitations regarding women's maternal role, sought to change people's consciousnesses to achieve the new society. The second, as this letter demonstrates, sought not the creation of a new society but the redemption of the old. As we shall see, this redemptive perspective sought to bolster and not abolish certain key institutions such as the family. Caroline Martyn was not alone in her equating of real, as opposed to established, Christianity with socialism. Indeed John Bruce Glasier went so far as to argue: 'Political Socialism in our own day inevitably assumes a religious complexion in the minds of its most earnest advocates.'⁹⁴

⁹³ Lena Wallis, Life and Letters of Caroline Martyn Labour Leader, London & Glasgow 1898. p. 34.

⁹⁴ J. Bruce Glasier, The Meaning of Socialism p. 113.

This particular socialist discourse most often struck a chord amongst those workers who had previously been affiliated to liberalism and non-conformism. Its humanistic impulse was directed towards the realisation of 'true' Christianity on earth. One consequence of this was the belief that socialism would strengthen the existing institutions of marriage and the family rather than alter them. Glasier, for example, saw the family 'in its truest examples...[as] a small Socialistic community in which each is for all and all are for each'.⁹⁵ This was quite different from the earlier Owenite analysis by which Morris in particular was influenced, which saw in the family the embodiment in miniature of the larger social world of individualism and competition. Glasier's remarks were echoed by Ramsay MacDonald, when he wrote that under socialism:

the family will probably enjoy an influence which it could not acquire under commercialism, for under commercialism it has been steadily decaying. The relation between parents and children will be closer, and be continued for longer periods than is now possible, and, consequently, the home will resume its lost religious significance. It will be altar fires that will burn on its hearth, and sacramental meals that will lie on its table.⁹⁶

Moral conservatism entered the socialist movement through two routes; those who had replaced established religion with the religion of socialism and those who privileged economic change above all else. The two were not unrelated. Robert Blatchford, in 1892, could write of 'the new movement here [in Manchester]; the new religion, which is Socialism, and something more than Socialism, is more largely the result of the labours of Darwin, Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens, Thoreau and Walt Whitman'.⁹⁷ At the same time,

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 105.

⁹⁶ James Ramsay MacDonald, The Socialist Movement (1911). Williams & Norgate, London n.d. p. 103.

⁹⁷ Robert Blatchford, The New Religion. Clarion Press, Manchester 1892. p. 3. BLHE 1880-1900.

however, he was writing to Carpenter concerning his writings on sexuality saying: 'if Socialists identify themselves with any sweeping changes in those relations the Industrial Change will be seriously retarded...the time is not ripe for Socialists, as Socialists, to meddle with the sexual question.'⁹⁸ Similarly, Katharine Bruce Glasier, whose earlier writings on socialism portrayed the spread of socialist ideas as akin to a holy man preaching the gospel,⁹⁹ could argue that socialism meant the strengthening of the home and the family, not its destruction.

The home is the greatest humanising factor we possess. We can only get a healthy state of Society by healthy homes. The institution is a notorious failure. The hotel child is worse. I maintain, then, that the first duty of married women is home building, not work in factories, and I would vote for the wholesale prohibition of married women's labour.¹⁰⁰

The two aspects of the religious discourse of socialism, the struggle to change consciousness and moral conservatism, illustrate the 'problematic potentiality' of consciousness. They demonstrate, above all, how the complex inheritance of socialist ideas from the period of the Owenites and Chartists influenced the late nineteenth century socialist movement providing it, at one and the same time, with a vision of liberation and a history of conservatism with regard to the family. The two aspects of the religious discourse co-existed in the early years of the development of socialism when it was in a state of flux and ideas flowed freely. By looking at the impact of socialism at a local level we are able to see how socialism and feminism, as expressed through the two strands, functioned at the

⁹⁸ Quoted in S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life'. p. 116.

⁹⁹ Katharine St. John Conway (later Bruce Glasier), 'The Religion of Socialism', in Katharine St. John Conway & J. Bruce Glasier, The Religion of Socialism: Two Aspects (1894). The Labour Press, Manchester n.d. BLHE 1900-1926.

¹⁰⁰ Speech reported by Priscilla Moulder, 'Married Women As Workers', Reynolds Newspaper April 24 1909. GTC 23/11.

grassroots; to see how women and men responded to the speeches and writings of Morris and Carpenter; and how personal relations were altered by the vision of socialism.

Most of the histories of the socialist movement in Britain in the last two decades of the nineteenth century have tended to concentrate upon the activities of the London groups and their leading personalities.¹⁰¹ In the writing of such histories local connections are apt to be forgotten or overlooked in the desire to see the totality. But for women, and especially those of the working-class, whose existences were often constrained by the demands of marriage and motherhood, these connections were of vital importance for they were very often the only way by which they could be drawn into the movement.

In Sheffield, where Carpenter lived for many years, Sallie Potter and Alice Dax, influenced by his ideas on the 'simplification of life', tried to rationalise both their dress and their homes.¹⁰² Both these women were later to become members of the suffrage movement almost certainly as a result of Carpenter's influence. In Bristol, where the influence of both Morris and Carpenter was particularly strong, there were four particular women, all of whom were active socialists and feminists, who attempted to work out their lives in relation to their socialist and feminist principles. They were: Helena Born, Miriam Daniell, Enid Stacy and Katharine St. John Conway. It was in the Bristol Socialist Society, Katharine Conway stated, that 'we were trained to feel from the start that the vital cleavage of

¹⁰¹ This is now being redressed by such studies as David Clarke, Colne Valley Radicalism and Socialism. The Portrait of a Northern Constituency in the Formative Years of the Labour Party. Longman, London 1981.

¹⁰² S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life'. p. 120.

interests the world over lay between the workers and the idle rich'.¹⁰³ Sadly, the record they have left behind them is all too incomplete. Born and Daniell left for America in 1890 where the prospects for a new life in an experimental community seemed more capable of realisation than at home. Of their time spent organising the unskilled women workers of Bristol in the early years of the 'new unionism' virtually no record has been left. Enid Stacy died, when still only in her early thirties, in 1903. And Katharine St. John Conway remained for many years under the shadow of her husband John Bruce Glasier, her feminism subsumed by the seemingly more important task of creating socialist parliamentarians. Nevertheless, through the lives of these four women, and their work in the Bristol Socialist Society, we are able to see how their socialist and feminist principles were put into practice.¹⁰⁴

Bristol was a city with a long dissenting tradition. It was also a city where Methodism was strong and where a number of millenarian sects had established themselves in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These sects included the Methodist New Connexion, the Swedenborgians and the Southcottians.¹⁰⁵ The Radical Henry Hunt stood for election in Bristol in 1812 and was involved in agitation there during the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁰⁶ In 1831, as part of the reform agitation before the

¹⁰³ Katharine Bruce Glasier, 'The Part Women Played In Founding The I.L.P. Reminiscences Of The Time When It Was Hard For A Woman To Be A Socialist'. Labour Leader April 9 1914. GTC 350/87.

¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately the records of the Bristol Socialist Society were destroyed in 1984. I have had to rely upon the notes Angela Tuckett made of them whilst she was researching the life of her aunt Enid Stacy.

¹⁰⁵ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1968. pp. 42, 48, 53 & 421-422. See also J.F.C. Harrison, The Second Coming. Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850. Rourledge & Kegan Paul, London 1979. pp. 110 & 117.

¹⁰⁶ E.P. Thompson, The Making, pp. 668 & 681.

passage of the Reform Act of 1832, Bristol experienced severe rioting.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, during the Chartist years Bristol was involved in the National Charter Association and was represented by Charles Hodgson Neesom at the first Convention.¹⁰⁸ Whilst it would be too much to claim that this history of dissension and radical activity predisposed the people of Bristol towards socialism, nevertheless it did provide an example for the socialists of the later nineteenth century.

In addition to being a centre of dissent, Bristol was also an important trading and manufacturing centre for the west of England. During the nineteenth century the size of the city grew five-fold; from sixty-one thousand in 1801 to three hundred and twenty-nine thousand in 1901.¹⁰⁹ Whilst this increase did not compare with that experienced in the northern manufacturing towns such as Manchester and Leeds, it outstripped that of Norwich, which along with Bristol, had been the two largest cities outside London in 1700.¹¹⁰ Thus Bristol survived the transition from an old to a new trading centre in a way in which Norwich did not. Much of the explanation for this lies in the fact that Bristol was a port. Two of its biggest manufacturers - the Wills tobacco company and Fry's chocolates - depended directly upon trade from the Americas for their raw materials. As well as these companies, there was a diverse array of trades carried on or near the city. In the strikes which occurred in the city between 1889 and 1890, for example, the workers involved included galvanised iron workers, gas workers, dockers, stay makers, cotton operatives, brush makers, hatters, oil and colour workers, pipe makers, coal carriers, scavengers, box

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists. Popular Politics In The Industrial Revolution Pantheon, New York 1984. p. 192.

¹⁰⁹ Figures cited in C.P. Hill, British Economic and Social History 1700-1982 Arnold, London 1985. p. 3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

makers, cigar makers, tramway-men, hauliers, blue factory workers and animal charcoal workers.¹¹¹

The Bristol Socialist Society came into existence as an independent group in December 1885. Prior to that date the Society had been, since February 1884, a branch of the Social Democratic Federation. In Bristol, unlike other provincial groups such as Sheffield, the Socialist Society was not formed directly from the extant radical association. When that latter body had been urged by some of its members to affiliate with the Democratic Federation in London in early 1883, the chairman felt that the matter should not be pressed.¹¹² The initiative, therefore, came from a group formed out of the Radical Reform Association¹¹³ called the Pioneer Class which met 'for the discussion of democratic and social reform schemes, and the mutual improvement of all its members.'¹¹⁴ By February 1884, this group was formally dissolved to be replaced by the Bristol branch of the Social Democratic Federation, under whose guidance it remained until accusations that the Federation's executive in London had received money from the Conservative Party to aid its campaign in the general election of 1885 led to disaffiliation and its continuation as an independent society.¹¹⁵

In April 1884 the Bristol branch issued a Manifesto addressed to 'Fellow Workers' which clearly set out its socialist principles:

We earnestly appeal to you to join us in endeavouring to establish equitable conditions to live and labour under...Our labour provides the

¹¹¹ Samson Bryher (Sam Bale), An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol. Bristol Labour Weekly, Bristol 1929. Part 2. pp. 19-20.

¹¹² S. Bryher An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol Part 1. p. 18.

¹¹³ Angela Tuckett, 'Our Enid'. Unpublished manuscript. p. 10.

¹¹⁴ S. Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol Part 1. p. 18.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 24. Despite this apparent break, the Bristol Society always maintained close ties with the Social Democratic Federation.

means of existence for all, and life to us should be beautiful, comfortable and happy. Why, amidst the abundance of wealth which our labour has produced, should want and misery exist? Remember it is not from any lack of wealth that this continues, but because there is no justice, or social order in its distribution...The present must be superseded by a more righteous system of production and distribution of wealth; there should be collective ownership of land, machinery and all means of production and distribution, and all departments organised on co-operative principles, and worked for the people's benefit, and hours of labour reduced, and for ever end this slavery, competing for bare subsistence.¹¹⁶

As Samson Brhyer, the historian of the Bristol Socialist Society, pointed out, the publication of this manifesto meant that Bristol 'openly advocated Socialism *six months prior to the Democratic Federation nationally declaring for it*'.¹¹⁷

For the first few years of its life the Bristol Socialist Society engaged in a number of diverse activities. During the winter of 1885-1886, when trade was bad and unemployment high, it organised meetings of the unemployed. It was also involved in local elections - with two successes. In January 1886 John Fox, General Secretary of the Bristol Trade and Provident Society, was elected to the School Board and in November 1887 Robert Tovey of the Clothier Cutters' Association was elected to the City Council representing St. Paul's Ward.¹¹⁸

Edward Carpenter was a particular favourite of the Society. His connection with Bristol appears to have occurred through the auspices of William Harrison Riley.¹¹⁹ Riley was the son of a Manchester Methodist preacher and worked as an engraver. In the 1860s he went to America where

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Part 1 p. 29.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* Author's Italics.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 33-34 & 39-43.

¹¹⁹ Sheila Rowbotham mistakenly refers to him as John Harrison Riley. 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life'. p. 38.

he met the poet Walt Whitman, whose work was to influence so many English socialists. On returning to England in the early 1870s, Riley joined the International Working Men's Association whose journal he edited and published. In April 1875 Riley arrived in Bristol to manage the Mutual Help Club. Because of a difference of opinion over the sale of alcohol at the Club, Riley left and, along with John Sharland - one of six brothers who were involved in the Bristol socialist movement - formed the Social Improvement Institute. The Institute was, unusually for the 1870s, open to women as well as men and combined educational work with cultural activities. The venture, however, only lasted eighteen months and in 1877 Riley moved to Sheffield.¹²⁰ What is interesting about these groups is that their titles appear to conform with mid-Victorian middle-class ideals concerning 'mutual help' and 'social improvement' and yet they were the precursors of the Bristol Socialist Society. This should alert us to the fact that bourgeois ideology was not imposed from above upon the working class but instead was subject to mediation and manipulation. What the middle class understood to mean by 'improvement' was clearly in this instance not the same as that of the working class.

In the 1870s, Sheffield was still a centre of communitarian ideals mainly because, as Sheila Rowbotham has written, 'a structure of small workshop production and small holdings persisted'.¹²¹ In the mid-'70s John Ruskin, through his Guild of St. George, financed a farm project at Totley, near Sheffield, where people could live communally on the land. In 1877 Riley was employed by Ruskin to look after the farm and it was here that he met Edward Carpenter, who was at that time a university extension lecturer in

¹²⁰ The information in this paragraph comes from S. Brhyer, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol Part 1. pp. 13-16.

¹²¹ S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the H.Hew Life' p. 38.

Yorkshire.¹²² Riley went on to introduce Carpenter to the highly musical Sharland family. This was how socialists seemed to meet each other in the early years of the socialist revival, or how people were introduced to socialism: a chance meeting; a mutual discovery of a love for Walt Whitman; or through a network of radical groups up and down the country, not yet socialist in the 1870s but looking towards a new way of life. In the summer of 1885 Carpenter donated £5 to the Bristol Socialist Society to start a library. The young Ramsay MacDonald, just eighteen years of age and newly arrived from Scotland, became the first librarian.¹²³ Carpenter further introduced E. A. Girdlestone to the movement in Bristol and in 1887 Girdlestone founded the Clifton and Bristol Christian Socialist Society. Its two honorary secretaries were Paul Stacy, the elder brother of Enid, and Hugh Holmes Gore, a local solicitor¹²⁴

The class composition of the Bristol group was predominantly that of skilled workers and members of the middle class. John Gregory, for example, was a shoemaker.¹²⁵ The occupations of the Sharland family are not known. However, the fact that they entered musical competitions

¹²² See *Ibid.* pp. 38-39. See also C. Tsuzuki, Edward Carpenter 1844-1929. Prophet of Human Fellowship pp. 38-41.

¹²³ See S. Brhyer, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol. Part 1. pp. 30-32. See also H. Hessel Tiltman, James Ramsay MacDonald. An Authentic Life. Jarrolds, London. n.d. p. 18.

¹²⁴ S. Brhyer, *op. cit.* Part 1 p. 42. See also A. Tuckett, 'Our Enid' p. 18. In 1895, Gore managed to cause a considerable rift among socialists in Bristol when, as a member of the School Board he opposed the appointment of a Jewish woman as a pupil teacher. This bitterness then spilled over when a by-election occurred in Bristol East a few weeks after this incident. See the correspondence between various Bristol socialists and Keir Hardie over Gore's candidature. Archives of the Independent Labour Party. FJC. 1895/41; 1895/46; 1895/48; 1895/53; 1895/56A; 1895/58; 1895/66; 1895/67; 1895/103 & 1895/106. See also S. Brhyer, *op. cit.* Part 2. pp. 55-56. Gore eventually stood as an Independent Labour candidate and was beaten into second place by only 132 votes.

¹²⁵ S. Brhyer. *op. cit.* Part 1. p. 12.

certainly suggests that they were not unskilled labourers.¹²⁶ The women members tended to be almost exclusively middle class. Katharine Conway was a teacher, had attended Cambridge University and was the daughter of a clergyman.¹²⁷ Miriam Daniell was married to a solicitor.¹²⁸ Helena Born's background is unknown but she did not have to earn her own living until she went to America.¹²⁹ Finally, Enid Stacy was the daughter of an artist, who obtained a B.A. from London University and also worked as a teacher.¹³⁰

In addition, the Bristol group is an illustration of how close-knit were the local societies of socialists. In general people joined the Bristol society either because there was a family tradition of radicalism or because they lived in close proximity to those who had just such a tradition. For example, the Sharland family was to provide the focal point for the group for over thirty years. At Edward Carpenter's funeral in July 1929, Robert Sharland was in attendance, praising Carpenter for his 'interest in all phases of the Socialist and Labour movement, realising that the success of these political and industrial efforts was an essential step to the higher state he ever visualised.'¹³¹ Mrs Pearce, who was born in 1897, recalled attending the Socialist Sunday School in the 1900s where '...Miss Sharland, Janet Tillet¹³² and Mr. Oxley would...teach separate classes...the history of

¹²⁶ Ibid. pp. 24-25.

¹²⁷ For details of Katharine Conway's life see Laurence Thompson, The Enthusiasts. A Biography of John & Katharine Bruce Glasier, Gollancz, London 1971. pp. 58-61.

¹²⁸ A. Tuckett, 'Our Enid'. p. 23. She was married to Edward Tuckett Daniell. Two Tuckett brothers married two Stacy sisters, hence the relationship between her and Enid Stacy.

¹²⁹ Information about Born is sketchy. See Helen Tufts, ed., Whitman's Ideal Democracy and Other Essays, Everett Press, Boston 1902. pp. xi-xxxv.

¹³⁰ See A. Tuckett. op. cit. Chapter 1.

¹³¹ Reported in the Social Democrat August 1929. Quoted in C. Tsuzuki, Edward Carpenter 1844-1929 pp. 192-193.

¹³² She ^{may} ~~would~~ have been a relative of Ben Tillet because the Tilletts came from Bristol.

socialism...for about an hour'.¹³³ Through the Sharland family, Robert Weare, their neighbour, was introduced to the group where he soon became active in the organising of unskilled workers. Carpenter's influence upon the group, both through his personal visits and through his works, was deep and long-lasting, and the branch saw him as 'a true counsellor, whose teaching and example inspired all'.¹³⁴ A speech by him could bring forward new members, whilst his works, in particular England's Ideal and Towards Democracy, provided the impetus for the conversion of many women and men in Bristol.

Becoming a socialist in the 1880s and 1890s meant far more than paying a membership fee; it also involved a dramatic change in life-style. For some it meant ostracism from previous friends and relations, whilst for others it could mean losing their jobs, as was the case with John Burns¹³⁵ who was sacked simply 'because I was a Social Democrat'.¹³⁶ As one member of the Bristol Society said:

we were despised, ostracised, spurned, and, as far as possible, persecuted. We stood alone as a very small but defiant body of rebels, with the finger of scorn pointed towards us; but, and perhaps largely because of this, we lived intensely and cared not for anything but our ideal and the genuine comradeship which had sprung up between us.¹³⁷

It was for this reason, and Bristol was not alone here, that local associations of socialists formed a distinct group with their own cultural

¹³³ Sandra Mullen, 'The Bristol Socialist Society 1885-1914', in Bristol's Other History Bristol BroadSides, Bristol 1983. p. 39.

¹³⁴ S. Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol, Part 1. p. 19

¹³⁵ John Burns, 1858-1943, was, along with Ben Tillett and Tom Mann, one of the leaders of the London dock strike of 1889. He was a member of the Social Democratic Federation but later became President of the Local Government Board in the Liberal Government of 1906. See his entry in Joyce M Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography. Vol. 5. Macmillan, London 1979. pp. 39-47.

¹³⁶ Quoted by S. Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896'. p. 15.

¹³⁷ S. Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol, Part 2. p. 5.

activities, not unlike the earlier Chartists and Owenites. Hence, women and children were actively welcomed into the group in order to preserve and foster family unity.¹³⁸ It was on Michaelmas Day 1887, Samson Bryher argued, that a new and wider phase of the socialist movement in Bristol began; one that went beyond 'propagation of the word'. This was the day the Bristol Socialist Society held a tea and social evening attended by thirty-four adults and a number of children. The significance of this event lay with the participation of women and families together with the men. It signalled, according to Bryher, the moment when gender equality became a reality within the movement rather than a vague ideal.¹³⁹ The cultural activities undertaken by the Bristol society ranged from musical evenings, where both the Stacy and Sharland families were in great demand, to lectures on a wide range of topics and the establishment of a Sunday School for the children.¹⁴⁰ In the 1890s, the Clarion movement led by Robert Blatchford from Manchester, was to extend these activities with its rambles in the countryside and cycling clubs which brought new-found freedom especially for women.¹⁴¹ All these activities were important in establishing the group's identity and a sense of unity among the members against the hostility of the world outside. In the case of women who joined the society this need for unity was particularly important as it took a considerable amount of courage for them to become involved in political activism, with the certain knowledge that they would be ostracised by society. Helena Born and Miriam Daniell 'were criticised, censured, and

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Miriam Daniell and Helena Born gave lectures on such topics as 'Why Women Should Organise' and 'The Evolution of Women'. See S. Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol. Part 2. p. 7.

¹⁴¹ See Sheila Rowbotham, 'Florence Exton-Hann - Socialist and Feminist', in S. Rowbotham, Dreams and Dilemmas. Florence stated that: 'mother and I rode bicycles and wore bloomers, but had to carry a skirt to put on when riding in a town for fear of being mobbed'. p. 224.

condemned for adopting the extreme course to which they were impelled by their convictions', and whilst some friends only mildly disapproved, others shunned them completely.¹⁴²

During the late 1880s and early 1890s, Bristol, along with other industrial centres in Britain, experienced a series of strikes involving previously non-unionised unskilled workers. The Bristol Socialist Society, and in particular the women of that society, played an important role in the organisation of the workers. It was in 1889 that, to aid the striking cotton workers who were not unionised and did not possess a strike fund, the Society formed a Strike Fund Committee of which Miriam Daniell became treasurer and Helena Born secretary.¹⁴³ A national appeal for money was launched through the pages of the Women's Union Journal in November 1889.¹⁴⁴ As part of their protest the women paraded every Sunday through the streets of Bristol, entering various churches along their way. It was to be by these means that both Enid Stacy and Katharine Conway decided to become active in the socialist movement.

Enid Stacy came from a family with a tradition of radical activity. Her father, Henry Stacy, was a working artist who was involved with the working men's cultural groups in Bristol.¹⁴⁵ This radical activity was accompanied by a deep religious commitment. Her brother Paul, as stated earlier, was already, by 1887, one of the two honorary secretaries of the Clifton and Bristol Christian Socialist Society. When she saw the striking cotton workers 'wet and desperate after many weeks of sullen holding out

¹⁴² H. Tufts, op. cit. p. xxi.

¹⁴³ S. Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol Part 2. pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁴ Women's Union Journal Vol. XIV. No. 166. November 15 1889. p. 89. WTUL Papers.

¹⁴⁵ A. Tuckett, 'Our Enid'. pp. 10-11.

for even a right to combine',¹⁴⁶ Enid decided that the time had come for her to offer her services to help organise the women workers into trade unions. Soon 'she was literally tramping the soles off her boots busily engaged making collections and organising work of every description - particularly interested was she in work having to do with the organisation of women⁶² into trade unions'.¹⁴⁷ Shortly after this she became involved with the newly established Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union, and in the following year when her cousin by marriage, Miriam Daniell, left for America with Helena Born, she took over her job as Honorary Secretary of the Association⁶⁰ for the Promotion of Trade Unionism amongst Women in Bristol.¹⁴⁸

A similar experience occurred to Katharine Conway whilst she was worshipping at the fashionable High Church of All Saints at Clifton. So impressed was she by watching the striking women walk silently down the aisle towards the altar that the following Monday she made her way to the Society's offices where Robert Weare presented her with a copy of England's Ideal by Edward Carpenter. This book awoke:

a new power of love and worship...within me...It was as if in that smoke-laden room a great window had been flung wide open and the vision of a new world had been shown me; of the earth reborn to beauty and joy, the home, to use Edward Carpenter's own words..."of a free people, proud in the mastery and divinity of their own lives"...As I went back to my Clifton lodgings I vaguely realised that every value life had previously held for me had been changed as by some mysterious alchemy. I was ashamed of the privileges and refinements of which I had previously been so proud; the joy of comradeship, the glory of life, lost and found in the "age-long, peerless cause", had been revealed to me, dimming all others.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ S. Bryher, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol Part 2. p. 23.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ A. Tuckett, 'Our Enid'. p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ K. Bruce Glasier, 'Edward Carpenter's Influence'. pp. 83-85.

Although this was Katharine's first introduction to socialism, she had, whilst a student of Classics at Newnham College, Cambridge, become acquainted with feminism through her teachers.¹⁵⁰

The tactics of taking strikers into the very heartland of bourgeois Victorian life, the High Church, seems to have been both a popular and effective one. In 1892, Enid Stacy, who had formed a branch of the Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union among the women confectionary workers at Sanders' factory, led the striking women every Sunday to the church where the owner worshipped until he conceded to their demands.¹⁵¹ By means such as these the gulf that existed between the professed religious beliefs of the Victorian bourgeoisie and their actual practice could be exposed. But the actions of the Bristol socialists and the conjunction between religious beliefs and conversion to socialism, evidenced in the experiences of Enid Stacy and Katharine Conway, illustrated just how close were the connections between religion and socialism in the early years of the socialist movement.

The Gas Workers' Union had been formed in London in March 1889 by Will Thorne.¹⁵² During the whole series of strikes that rocked London in this year, Eleanor Marx formed a branch of that union among the women strikers at the India Rubber works at Silvertown. As a result of her activities she was invited in April 1890 to visit Bristol to help celebrate the first workers' May Day.¹⁵³ Whilst there she stayed with the Stacy family with

¹⁵⁰ K. Bruce Glasier, 'The Part Women Played in Founding the I.L.P.'.

¹⁵¹ Sarah Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement, Davis-Poynter, London 1980. pp. 51-54.

¹⁵² Will Thorne, 1857-1946, was a member of the Social Democratic Federation. He was the Labour MP for West Ham South from 1906-1945. See his entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 1. Macmillan, London 1972. pp. 314-319.

¹⁵³ S. Brhyer. op. cit. Part 2. p. 24.

whom Katharine Conway was also lodging. Prior to her involvement in the socialist movement Katharine had been a teacher at Redlands High School, where Enid Stacy had attended both as a pupil and a teacher. After it became known, however, that Katharine had joined the socialists, she was forced to leave her post and seek employment elsewhere, as was Enid Stacy. It was because of her acquaintance with Enid Stacy that Katharine was offered accommodation by the Stacy family. During her visit:

Half the night Eleanor Marx held us spellbound, recounting the hardships of the early days of the International, the magnificent sacrifices of the patrician women, of the Russian struggle for freedom. Sternly she bade us renounce, if we were to be worthy of the comradeship of the workers of the world, all the older feminist demand for equal political rights with men, until the franchise should be granted to human beings and not to property. It was the price of the workers' trust in us. Middle-class men had barely used the workers in their battle for freedom. Let middle-class women, at any rate the Socialists among them, strive to make atonement.¹⁵⁴

For Eleanor Marx the primary struggle was that of the workers against capitalism; the specific needs of women were to be remedied once capitalism had been abolished.¹⁵⁵ This attitude was in direct contrast to the beliefs held by Born and Daniell who stated that 'whatever degrades one member of a sex degrades all, and an insult offered to one sex is an insult to both'.¹⁵⁶

These differing attitudes were consonant with the historical inheritance of both feminism and socialism and can be seen in the personal politics of the four Bristol women under consideration. Helena Born and Miriam Daniell believed that it was only by creating a new society with a different moral

¹⁵⁴ K. Bruce Glasier, 'The Part Women Played in Founding the I.L.P.'

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, 'The Woman Question'. First published in The Westminster Review 1885. Reprinted in Marxism Today, Vol. XVI, No. 3 March 1972, p. 86 where they say: 'Get rid of the capitalist system of production, say the Socialists, and prostitution will pass away'.

¹⁵⁶ Helena Born, 'The Last Stand Against Democracy in Sex', in H. Tufts, op. cit p. 75.

code that women and workers would be emancipated. This belief led them to America where they sought to live out their ideals in an experimental community in Sacramento, California. They were literally re-tracing the footsteps of that earlier generation of socialists – the Owenites – who also left England for the promise of the 'new world' of America. Like those Owenites also, Born and Daniell were to turn away from seeking to change society from within, pursuing instead an isolated community. Enid Stacy also believed that the causes of socialism and feminism could not be separated from each other but she chose to work within the socialist movement itself, hoping that by her presence she could exert influence over the direction of the movement and that a change of consciousness was possible through continuous propaganda work. Katharine Conway was to accept Eleanor Marx's advice and this, coupled with her deeply religious outlook which was inherently morally conservative, led her away from feminism and experimentation in personal relationships in the belief that these issues would prove divisive within the socialist movement. It was to be almost twenty years before she realised that the advice had been mistaken. As she wrote in 1914:

There lies the apology, if apology be needed, for the earlier I.L.P.'s women's attitude so sternly upbraided years afterwards by Mrs. Pankhurst and others as "treachery to our sex." Since then, as we know, the position has been reversed. With generous and enlightened zeal, the men of the I.L.P. carrying the Labour Party with them for the most part, have declared that they had no right to ask such sacrifice of their sisters.¹⁵⁷

In the lives of Helena Born, Miriam Daniell, Enid Stacy and Katharine Conway the feminist problematic of equality and difference was re-stated in the context of the two religious discourses of socialism. Born and Daniell, following Carpenter, expressed their socialist ideal for human unity in spiritual terms. Their lesbian relationship, which is discussed below,

¹⁵⁷ K. Bruce Glasier, 'The Part Women Played In Founding the I.L.P.'.

was both a personal expression of this ideal and the reason for their move to America. Their desire for freedom and equality in all human relationships involved a change of consciousness which was too advanced for some sections of the socialist movement. Enid Stacy, like Born and Daniell, embraced that religious discourse which argued for a new society. But she acknowledged the co-existence of both equality and difference for women. Katharine Conway, however, ultimately came to espouse the morally conservative religious discourse, arguing that women were different from men through her emphasis upon the family and maternity. Whilst all these divergent attitudes could be contained within the early socialist movement when it was still in a period of growth, later on, as the movement became less open to experimentation and new ideas, socialist ideology became both more rigid and narrower in its outlook. This narrowing of outlook was to lead to the exclusion of both feminism and the search for a new society from its agenda.

Changes in life-styles, friends and occupation, as mentioned earlier, were an integral part of becoming a member of a socialist group. In order to consolidate their growing contact with the workers of Bristol, Helena Born and Miriam Daniell moved from their homes in the middle-class district of Clifton to a house in the working-class area of St. Philip's, where they both tried to live by Carpenter's dictum of the 'simplification of life'.

Here, while gaining the confidence and respect of the people, they set an example of practical simplicity in household matters, showing aesthetic possibilities in colour and ingenious and artistic adaptation which were a revelation to their neighbours. With their own hands they tinted the walls of their rooms and waxed the uncarpeted floors, while from the most commonplace materials they improvised many articles of furniture and decoration, combining both beauty and utility.¹⁵⁸

In preparation for a visit from Carpenter, Helena 'made the floor of my room shine with extra brightness this morning, in anticipation, with the aid of a

¹⁵⁸ Tufts, *op. cit.* p. xvi.

little beeswax, "turps", and "elbow-grease".¹⁵⁹ For Miriam Daniell, moving in with Helena Born required especial courage because it meant leaving her husband at a time when divorce laws still operated very much in favour of men.

Moving to a working-class district, for Born and Daniell, was not a case of middle-class 'slumming', but rather involved living by their own principles, which saw the 'simplification of life' as necessary for the regeneration of society. Born, like Carpenter, believed implicitly in freedom and equality, and the changes in her dress and life-style were the outward manifestations of her intense belief in the freedom of women. For, as she wrote, 'genuine comradeship is possible only when the man becomes effeminate or when the women to some extent rationalises her costume'.¹⁶⁰ And she angrily denounced those who saw such experiments as trivial:

Specialists ardent for emancipation dismiss these facts and focus their energies on the removal of particular grievances that appeal to them. They do not remember that 'it is not what is done to us but what is made of us that wrongs us.' They confess their fear of imperiling the reform they have at heart if they attack the popular idols. Higher education, the franchise, economic independence - these will bring about the millennium of freedom and equality. What are the results of this indifference? The perpetuation of the ideal of subserviency in which women are regarded as adjuncts, objects of use or pleasure, or both.¹⁶¹

Thus for Born, the socialist movement was not to be based solely upon economic freedom but had at its heart the emancipation of women also.

The principles of socialism, as I understand them, seem to me economically incontrovertible, and to comprise spiritual ideals of unity and brotherhood which alone can transmute the materialism of our time. And I feel that the only effectual way to convince others of the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. xvii.

¹⁶⁰ H. Born, 'The Last Stand Against Democracy in Sex'. p. 75.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 73-74.

truth of one's principles, and to bring about the new time, is by living them.¹⁶²

The involvement of women in the day to day activities of the Bristol Socialist Society had already implied a changed attitude between the sexes. By their dress, their life-styles, and their appearances on the lecture platform, such women were kicking over the traces of conventional behaviour. Living by one's own principles also meant the freedom to love and be loved. However, it was this issue, far more than any other, which was to prove to be the most difficult for them. When Edward Carpenter had written: 'Love is the one ultimate law, equality the one ultimate condition',¹⁶³ he did not see this as a licence for libertine behaviour; 'the object of sex is a person, and cannot be used for private advantage without the most dire infringement of the law of equality'.¹⁶⁴ Unconventional love relationships were a feature of the early socialist movement. Perhaps the most notorious of all these relationships was that between Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling. This relationship however, according to Marx's highly partisan biographer, was to bring Eleanor considerable unhappiness, and Aveling's sexual and financial habits were the direct cause of her suicide in 1898.¹⁶⁵

Katharine Conway maintained for a while a stormy relationship with the married Dan Irving, a member of the Social Democratic Federation. She also had to endure the unwanted attentions of W.S. De Mattos, the lecture secretary of the Fabian Society,¹⁶⁶ as did Enid Stacy who wrote that whilst

¹⁶² H. Tufts, Whitman's Ideal Democracy p. xviii.

¹⁶³ S. Brhyer. op. cit. Part 1. p. 20.

¹⁶⁴ E. Carpenter, Love's Coming of Age p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ ^{y.} Kapp, Eleanor Marx Vol. 2. Part V.

¹⁶⁶ L. Thompson, The Enthusiasts p. 73.

he was staying with the Stacy family he tried hard to convince Enid of: 'the idea that to be a socialist and a "free lover" was one and the same thing. At all times and in all places the talk would be brought around by him to the same subject.' Enid commented ruefully: 'Though I am by no means a believer in conventional morality I feel that such views as De Mattos holds could not possibly do anything else than bring destruction on any state or Society.'¹⁶⁷ Such behaviour on the part of men cut right across Stacy's beliefs in the emancipation of women in the socialist movement. Towards the end of the century, when she published a programme of necessary reforms for women, her first demand was that of the right of women to control their own bodies.¹⁶⁸

Other women were also caught up in the desire for the ideal relationship. Olive Schreiner, one-time member of the Fellowship of the New Life, and a close friend of Carpenter's, was passionately attached to Havelock Ellis, the writer on the psychology of sex, whose marriage to Edith Lees remained unconsummated because of his sexual predilections and her lesbianism.¹⁶⁹ Kate Salt¹⁷⁰ in Sheffield maintained a similarly hopeless love for Carpenter. For many women, the pressure of maintaining an alternative life-style was too much for them. Olive Schreiner survived by putting her work first.

It is only in work that has no connection with the self, that we can find rest to our spirits. Life, personal life, is a great battlefield. Those who enter it must fight. Those who enter it and will not fight get riddled with bullets. The only thing for them is to keep out of it and have no

¹⁶⁷ Letter written by Enid Stacy to ? April 5, 1892. Copy courtesy of Angela Tuckett.

¹⁶⁸ Enid Stacy, 'A Century of Women's Rights', in Edward Carpenter, ed., Forecasts of the Coming Century. Labour Press, Manchester 1897. pp. 100-101.

¹⁶⁹ See Jeffrey Weeks, 'Havelock Ellis and the Politics of Sex Reform,' in Rowbotham & Weeks. op. cit. pp. 162-163 & pp. 151-152.

¹⁷⁰ Kate Salt was the daughter of a master at Eton. Her brother Jim was connected through Cambridge with people like Lytton Strachey. See Stephen Winsten, Salt and His Circle. Hutchinson, London 1951.

personal life...One will never find a man to love, that some other woman does not desire.¹⁷¹

But perhaps the most unconventional relationship of all was that between Helena Born and Miriam Daniell. They first met each other through the Bristol Women's Liberal Association. At that time Miriam was still living with her husband and her daughter, Sunrise. But through their gradual involvement with the socialists, and their growing love for each other, they soon decided to share a house together. A friend recalled of them:

The regard which Miriam excited in those who came in close contact with her bordered upon reverence. Our Bristol socialists all felt that kind of influence, and no amount of kicking over the conventional traces seemed to affect our regard for her, except to increase it. As some said, her heart was as big as her body, and that heart always aflame with irresistible love. To Helena's regard for her there was an added devotion which it was grand to know. If ever we meet Miriam in the spiritual world she will have her arms around Helena's neck and declare that she was the dearest friend, the most helpful companion, the one who understood her best – and Helena will not believe it.¹⁷²

Unfortunately, not everyone was to be as understanding as this, and soon comment surrounding their relationship forced them to leave Bristol for America in late 1890, where they hoped 'for the better time when it would no longer be deemed a social crime to live in accordance with one's highest aspirations'.¹⁷³

The two religious discourses of socialism, as proclaimed by the leading propagandists and lived by women and men, showed both the constraints and liberatory aspects of their ideological inheritance. The work of both Morris and Carpenter had inspired within people a new hope for the future. Between them, these two men provided women and men who were profoundly

¹⁷¹ Quoted in S. Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life'. p. 43.

¹⁷² H. Tufts. *op. cit.* p. xx.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p. xxi.

disillusioned by the existing state of society with the vision of a new society which had as its basis freedom and equality. For this new world to come about women and men needed to become actively conscious of the spirit of unity within themselves, towards each other, and towards nature. A complete revolution in life, in the relationship between women and men, and the economic relationship between capitalist and worker, necessitated more than a change in the mode of production. It involved, rather, a complete reconstruction of the moral, ethical and religious base of society. This could only come about through a change of consciousness.

For Morris, the task had been to go out and 'make' socialists; to empower people with the knowledge necessary for change. For Carpenter, the hope was by example. It was only by living the new life that others could be persuaded to do likewise. However, Morris' new life was foregrounded in the economic relationship between capitalist and worker. Whilst he made the emancipation of women implicit in his work and recognised that oppressive relations had their origin in the family, he was ultimately unable to perceive women beyond their maternal role. Carpenter, on the other hand, foregrounded sexuality and personal relationships perhaps to the detriment of a full understanding of economics. Although a member of the Socialist League, his years of active involvement in the socialist movement were few, despite the fact that his influence persisted for many years. He, too, was to base women's position in society upon maternity, whether actual or spiritual.

Both the strengths and the weaknesses of the socialist and feminist inheritance were revealed in their work. In both Morris and Carpenter's work this strength lay in the compelling manner in which they envisaged and proclaimed the new life. The weakness, for Morris, lay in his independent stance from working-class organisations and political institutions. In the first place this carried with it an implicit, and at times explicit, hostility

towards organised feminism. Secondly, it severely constricted his ability to change working-class consciousness. And thirdly, by so doing, he failed to understand the lived experience of ordinary women and men and their need for immediate reforms.

The weakness for Carpenter lay in the biological determinism of his androgynous future, which made 'innate' homosexuality a precursor of the changed relationship between women and men. His work was further weakened by its stress upon individualism, for at no time did he suggest how society was to move beyond individual experiments in the new life, as he himself lived it, to a complete alteration of the social system. By withdrawing from society and by focussing upon sexuality Carpenter, too, revealed the problems of an Owenite inheritance when brought into contact with the language of the new sexologists. Both Morris and Carpenter sought to destroy the false dichotomies of Victorian gendered ideology but, in the process, they also reflected that ideology by replicating the social distinction between the sexes on the basis of biological functions.

They failed in their purpose because, in the end, trying to change people's consciousnesses simply was not enough, for without a corresponding strategy it did not and could not become the actual mechanism for change, particularly in the light of the co-existence of the two strands of the religious discourse within the socialist movement. Both Morris and Carpenter had accurately portrayed the present state of society and had proceeded to present people with a vision of what the future could be like; but how to get from one to the other was never made explicit, an omission which was exacerbated in Morris's case by his stance of independence from all existing institutions and in Carpenter's case by his reluctance to identify himself with any particular organisation. They failed also because the very use of 'utopian' language which initially brought people into the socialist movement at the same time obviated the need for a thorough

theoretical understanding of socialism. Thus many of those who joined the movement brought with them their old prejudices. As Hannah Mitchell discovered:

a lot of the Socialist talk about freedom was only talk and these Socialist young men expected Sunday dinners and huge teas with home-made cakes, potted meat and pies, exactly like their reactionary fellows. Like Lowell's pious editor, they believed in 'freedom's cause' but thought that liberty is a kind of thing that 'don't agree with wives'.¹⁷⁴

During the period of growth, when the socialist movement was in a state of flux and many different schemes were disseminated it was possible for socialists to combine the desire for a more equitable economic system with a desire for a qualitatively different way of life. But in the 1890s the labour movement turned increasingly towards the attainment of more immediate goals such as the eight-hour day and independent labour representation. It is the desire for parliamentary representation and the implications this had for both socialist and feminist ideals which will be examined in the next chapter .

¹⁷⁴ H. Mitchell, The Hard Way Up, p. 96.

CHAPTER THREE

INDEPENDENCE OR ALLIANCE: THE MAKING OF A POLITICAL PARTY 1883-1900

On January 3rd 1893 Fred Hammill, a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, President of the Vehicular Traffic Workers' Union and a member of the Executive of the Fabian Society,¹ addressed a meeting at Newcastle on 'The Necessity of an Independent Labour Party'.

Some persons say we are not yet ripe for independent labour representation, we are not yet ripe to take an independent line, therefore ought to proceed quietly, submissively, and contentedly on a permeating policy...I contend that the political machine has proved good for centuries in the interest of the monarch and the aristocrat, the classes and the capitalists, and it is equally good for you, equally capable of producing legislative reform beneficial to labour if you wish it and will use it in a true representative capacity.²

Hammill's speech and his position as both a trade unionist and a socialist point to some of the reasons why the need for an independent political party arose at this time. As a member of the Fabian Society his words reveal a dissatisfaction with its policy of permeation, which could be interpreted as meaning a general inaction for the majority whilst being led by an active elite few. As a trade unionist, moreover, in the light of the rapid growth of semi- and unskilled unions under the leadership of socialists, which signalled the development of the 'new unionism', his experiences informed him that permeation and inaction were inadequate policies for bringing socialism into the lives of workers. The formation of a political party was,

¹ According to A. E. P. Duffy: 'Hammill was the only prominent trade unionist ever elected to the Fabian Executive, and was made much of by the Fabians as proof that they were in touch with the trade unions'. 'Differing Policies and Personal Rivalries In The Origins Of The Independent Labour Party'. *Victorian Studies*, Vol.6, September 1962, p. 53.

² Fred Hammill, *The Necessity of an Independent Labour Party*. Independent Labour Party, London 1893. pp. 9-14. BLHE 1880-1900.

therefore, not seen by Hammill as the final triumph for socialism but as the beginning of a new era of co-operation between socialists and trade unionists in which political and industrial aims would be united.

I do not put my trust entirely in payment of members, an eight hour day, adult suffrage, free education, and other Parliamentary reforms, as likely to emancipate the people. I do say they are stepping stones, and when they are written on the Statute Book of England, then will begin the true democratic fight for the social revolution. As a trades' unionist, I clearly see we must educate our fellow-workers - through our branch and society organisations - to higher ideals of life, and a greater knowledge of their own power.³

Less than two weeks following this speech a number of representatives of local socialist societies came together in Bradford to form the Independent Labour Party with the intention of securing, amongst other reforms, 'the collective and communal ownership of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange'.⁴ Among this group were Fabian Society members, trade unionists, Labour Church members,⁵ ex-members of the now defunct Socialist League and representatives of the Social Democratic Federation. From this moment the socialist movement in England entered a new phase in its development. The spirit of independence which had so marked the Socialist League and, to a slightly lesser extent, the Social Democratic Federation,⁶ appeared to have been replaced by one of alliance. And yet, as the report of that first conference of 1893 indicated,

³ Ibid. p. 20.

⁴ Report of the First General Conference of the Independent Labour Party. Labour Literature Society, Glasgow 1893. p. 4. BLHE 1880-1900. The words 'and communal' were omitted from the original resolution, which was then carried almost unanimously.

⁵ The Labour Church, under the leadership of John Trevor an ex-Unitarian minister, was established in Manchester in 1891. By 1895 the Church existed in some twenty towns, predominantly, though not exclusively, in the north of England. See Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924 Faber & Faber, London 1926. p. 72 & pp. 95-96. The journal of the Labour Church was the Labour Prophet.

⁶ The Social Democratic Federation, unlike the Socialist League, always advocated parliamentary action whilst opposing trade union militancy.

the appearance was deceptive for, if anything, the birth of the first political party in England to expressly represent the interests of the working class arose not solely from a spirit of unity but also from discord and dissension.⁷

This chapter investigates the socialist problematic of independence and alliance; in particular, the myriad of elements which combined to form the Independent Labour Party and the attitude of other socialist groups to this development. This examination is pursued on the basis of both historical inheritance and the manner in which that inheritance was shaped by the specific circumstances of the 1890s. The Independent Labour Party represented a confluence of socialist and labour elements, each of which emerged from quite distinct traditions. The delineation of each of these elements highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses of the new organisation. Further, such a methodology is essential to an understanding of the relationship between feminism and socialism in the last decade of the nineteenth century as the Independent Labour Party represented the largest group of organised socialists in England. The ILP was, moreover, the precursor of the Labour Party and its policies with regard to both feminism and socialism were therefore critical for the acceptance of both of these in the twentieth century. The aim of this chapter is not to argue that either the Independent Labour Party or the trade union movement represented reactionary elements in the struggle for a socialist society but, rather, to show that critical factors intervened to belie the spirit of unity within the socialist movement which the formation of the Independent Labour Party ostensibly proclaimed.

The chapter opens with a discussion of two moves towards alliance among socialists, between avowed socialists representing the Social

⁷ For a full analysis of the various differences among and between socialists see A. E. P. Duffy, 'Differing Policies and Personal Rivalries', pp. 43-65.

Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society and the remnants of the Socialist League and between trade unions and local socialist societies which resulted in the formation of the Independent Labour Party. That the impetus towards alliance sprang from two distinct sources illustrates how urgent this impetus was in the years 1892-3. At the same time, however, it also illustrates the extent of the differences which existed across the broad spectrum of socialist groups. The fragility of this alliance emerged clearly with the formation of the Independent Labour Party. More than any other issue, trade unionism exposed the fragility and difficulties of this alliance. The chapter describes those elements within the trade union movement which both assisted and hindered the possibility of a broad alliance between socialists. Those elements which have been isolated for consideration include the attitude of trade unionists to women, to work and skills, and to the political parties which involved the articulation of a femininity and masculinity contrary to that espoused by those socialists who sought to create a new society through a change of consciousness.

It will be argued if the trade union movement, generally, was hostile to socialism, certain key socialist groups reciprocated that hostility. Through an examination of the attitude of the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League towards trade unionism it is argued that these groups perpetuated that hostility and in turn contributed to the impossibility of a broad socialist alliance. Finally, the chapter examines the rise of the new unionism which, because it was led by socialists, promised to bridge the divide between trade unionists and socialist groups. Such a reconciliation did not eventuate and this failure is examined in the light of the complex inheritance which provided the background to the new unionism.

The period during which the arguments for socialist unity were being aired corresponded with a time of political, social and industrial change. The pressure for change came from the radicals within the two established

political parties as well as from socialists.⁸ All the various socialist groups were engaged in a struggle over definitions of change. The issues of independence and alliance, therefore, took place on several different levels at the same time. It was not simply a struggle for ascendancy between the various socialist organisations; nor was it merely a question as to whether a working-class party should participate in the electoral process; it was also a question of differentiation from the radicalism expressed by some members of the existing political parties, but, pre-eminently, the Liberals. It was in relation to all these issues that the possibilities for alliance and the factors for disunity presented themselves.

The impetus behind the conference in Bradford came from the Trades Union Congress of the previous year.⁹ Even before the ILP was formed, as this development and Fred Hammill's speech made apparent, it was clear that the new organisation would have close ties with the trade union

⁸ Radicalism, in the sense in which it was used by all the various socialist groups, referred to those who sought ameliorative reforms but who had no desire to see the abolition of the state or a fundamental reconstruction of society. Within the Conservative camp there existed the "Fourth Party", composed of Randolph Churchill, John Gorst, Henry Drummond Wolff and Arthur Balfour. Led by Churchill, this was a strange amalgam of conservative and radical views. Over the Employers' Liability Act of 1880, for example, the Fourth Party accused the Government of not doing enough to protect workers from industrial injury. Yet, at the same time, Churchill defined 'Tory Democracy' as: 'a democracy which has embraced the principles of the Tory Party. It is a democracy which believes that a hereditary monarchy and hereditary House of Lords are the strongest fortifications which the wisdom of man, illuminated by the experience of centuries, can possibly devise for the protection of democratic freedom'. See E. J. Feuchtwanger, Democracy and Empire. Britain 1865-1914, Edward Arnold, London 1987. pp. 166 & 168. On the Liberal side there was Joseph Chamberlain, whose 'unauthorised programme' of 1886 called for free primary education and the end to laissez-faire, but whose policy on Irish Home Rule was to lead to a sizeable faction of Liberal-Unionists deserting the Liberal Party for the Conservatives. See Michael Bentley, Politics Without Democracy 1815-1914, Fontana, London 1984. pp. 231-292; Robert Rhodes James, The British Revolution. British Politics, 1880-1939. Vol. 1, Hamish Hamilton, London 1976. pp. 81-103.

⁹ See Iain McLean, Keir Hardie, Allen Lane, London 1975. Joseph Burgess, the editor of the Workman's Times, a journal which was circulated around the woollen towns of Yorkshire, proposed in 1892 that an arrangement be made whereby the local groups of socialists could be put in touch with each other. Keir Hardie came to the aid of Burgess helping to establish an Arrangements Committee at the 1892 Trades Union Congress which was then responsible for co-ordinating the conference in Bradford. pp. 49-50.

movement. This was confirmed at the conference itself where the largest number of representatives came from the socialist societies in the North of England from which area trade unionism also drew the major part of its strength. But the issue of alliance had also been mooted in London when William Morris, having heard about the Arrangements Committee of the TUC, urged the leaders of the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation in December 1892 to come together with the Hammersmith Socialist Society¹⁰ to draw up a joint manifesto of agreed socialist aims.¹¹ The Manifesto proclaimed that:

whatever differences may have arisen between them in the past, all who can fairly be called Socialists are agreed in their main principles of thought and action...Some constructive social theory is asked for and none are offered except the feudal or Tory theory which is incompatible with democracy, the Manchester or Whig theory which has broken down in practice, and the Socialist theory. It is, therefore, opportune to remind the public once more of what Socialism means to those who are working for the transformation of our present un-socialist state into a collectivist republic, and who are entirely free from the illusion that the amelioration or "moralisation" of the conditions of capitalist private property can do away with the necessity for abolishing it. Even those re-adjustments of industry and administration which are Socialist in form will not be permanently useful unless the whole state is merged into an organised commonwealth.¹²

Having outlined a series of necessary reforms to prepare for the socialist commonwealth, the Manifesto concluded: 'In order to effect the change from capitalism to co-operation, from unconscious revolt to conscious re-organisation, it is necessary that we Socialists should constitute ourselves

¹⁰ The Hammersmith Socialist Society contained the remnants of the Socialist League following the takeover of the League's journal Commonweal by the anarchist wing of the League in 1890.

¹¹ See George Bernard Shaw, 'Morris As I Knew Him' in May Morris, William Morris. Artist, Writer, Socialist Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1936. Vol. 2. pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

¹² Manifesto of the Joint Committee of Socialist Bodies. Published jointly by the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society and the Hammersmith Socialist Society 1893. pp. 1-4. SDF Leaflets and Pamphlets 1883-1931. 1893/3

into a distinct political party with definite aims, marching steadily along our own highway without reference to the convenience of political factions.'¹³

The Manifesto bore the unmistakable imprint of Morris with its emphasis upon the combination of thought and action, keeping to the forefront socialist principles whilst at the same time proposing immediate reforms which would assist in the development of a consciously revolutionary working class.¹⁴ That Morris was in tune with a general feeling among socialists is clear not only from the words of Fred Hammill but also from Engels who, whilst being suspicious of the leaders of the Independent Labour Party, felt that: 'Socialism has penetrated the masses in the industrial districts enormously in the past years and I am counting on these masses to keep the leaders in order.'¹⁵ But Morris's desire for socialist unity was to be undermined by the attitude of both the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society at the founding conference of the Independent Labour Party.

¹³ Ibid. pp. 7-8. The immediate reforms proposed by the Manifesto were: an Eight Hours law; prohibition of child labour for wages; equal payment of men and women for equal work; an adequate minimum wage for all adults employed in the Government and municipal services, or in any monopolies, such as railways, enjoying state privileges; suppression of all sub-contracting and sweating; universal suffrage for all adults, men and women alike; and public payment for all public service. Ibid. pp. 6-7.

¹⁴ George Bernard Shaw later wrote that because of irreconcilable differences between himself and Henry Hyndman: 'There was nothing for it but to omit policies and substitute platitudes that any Church Congress could have signed.' G. B. Shaw, 'Morris as I Knew Him'. p. xxxvi. However, as E. P. Thompson has pointed out, Shaw wrote a week after Morris' death that: 'I did not believe in the proposed union and, in fact, did not intend that it should be carried out if I could help it.' E. P. Thompson, William Morris. Romantic To Revolutionary. (1955). Pantheon Press, New York 1976. p. 606. As a consequence, the Fabian Society withdrew from the Committee in July 1893.

¹⁵ Frederick Engels in a letter to F. A. Sorge, a German socialist, January 18, 1893. Reprinted in Marx and Engels On Britain. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1953. p. 533.

The conference opened with a dispute over the credentials of Edward Aveling, representing the Bloomsbury Socialist Society and the Legal Eight Hours League, George Bernard Shaw, representing the Fabian Society and W. S. De Mattos, also representing the Fabians. Whilst the credentials of all three were accepted by the conference,¹⁶ Shaw, on his part, made it clear that the Fabian Society was not interested in supporting the new party.

The Fabian Society could not merge itself into this party when it had federated, because they were a Socialist Society, and it was their duty to form independent Labour associations, and keep them up to the mark...The Fabian Society must remain outside in order to keep the Labour Party to the straight path, and would only help them as long as they went in the right direction.¹⁷

Shaw was supported by A. G. Wolfe of Colne Valley who stressed that: 'the position of the Social Democratic Federation, a branch of which he represented, was just the same as that of the Fabian Society. They could not pledge their organisation to affiliate with any body. Yet, like the Fabian Society, they had always done everything that they could for the Independent Labour Party upon every occasion.'¹⁸ The degree to which the London leaders were out of touch with the desires of their provincial groups was demonstrated by the Fabian delegate for Jarrow, Margaret Reynolds, whose own society had instructed her to vote in favour of federation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Whilst Aveling's credentials were accepted unanimously, those of Shaw and De Mattos were passed by a very slight majority and were subject to further challenges as the conference got under way.

¹⁷ Report of the First General Conference of the Independent Labour Party, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7. Another Fabian delegate, James Sexton from Liverpool, also expressed his surprise at hearing Shaw's words. *Ibid.* p. 6. It is important here to make the distinction between the London leadership of both the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation and their provincial societies. Disagreements over policies and personalities which loomed so large in London tended to fade away in local areas where bonds of friendship overcame factional fighting.

From the outset the Independent Labour Party was faced with the problem of not only trying to co-ordinate local socialist societies which were affiliated to a variety of socialist and labour organisations, it also had to cope with the explicit rejection by the national bodies of the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation. The immediate test for the new party was to hold these very disparate elements together, and it did so in ways which served to highlight its own weaknesses. At the founding conference, debates occurred and decisions were made which brought to the fore the tensions between these elements and the differing traditions from which the various delegates had emerged.

George Carson, a delegate from Glasgow, moved that the party should be called the Socialist Labour Party.²⁰ He was vehemently opposed by Ben Tillett, who had been one of the leaders of the London dock strike of 1889, whose response indicated the necessity felt by some delegates to appeal to the trade union movement.

He wished to capture the trades' unionists of this country, a body of men well organised, who paid their money, and were Socialists at their work every day, and not merely on the platform, who did not shout for blood-red revolution, and, when it came to revolution, sneaked under the nearest bed. Let them remember that there was a vast organisation of men in this country who were treading in the direction of their economic salvation, and who, for hard work, would compare most favourably with any of the Socialist teachers of men...Not far from this place was a body of Lancashire operatives who were ruled by Tory leaders, but for real, vital, effective work there was not a Socialist party in the whole world who could show such effective organisation as these men could.²¹ (Cheers). Therefore he did not want the men who

²⁰ A Scottish Labour Party had been formed in 1888. Carson believed that this body was now committed to including the word socialist in its title. However, a Socialist Labour Party, based mainly around the Clyde, was not established in Scotland until 1903 following a split from the Social Democratic Federation.

²¹ Tillett is referring here to the actions of a federation of Master Spinners in Oldham. In November 1892 they combined to lock-out their workers in an attempt to force a 5% wage cut. The lock-out continued for five months.

were more advanced to deride and insult such a body, but he would rather trust to the intelligence which slowly groped for its salvation. If the Labour Party was to be called the Socialist Labour Party he would repudiate it.²²

Carson's motion was defeated and the title of Independent Labour Party was adopted.

Those who wished to make explicit that the new party was socialist in orientation suffered a further defeat. The Manchester delegates, led by Robert Blatchford, wished to see incorporated into the constitution of the ILP the fourth clause of their own constitution which committed members to vote only for a socialist candidate at elections and to abstain from voting when a socialist candidate was not standing. The mover of this resolution, William Johnson, stated that the reason why it was important that this Clause be adopted was: 'if the party was to secure the confidence and adherence of the workers, they must place its independence beyond dispute, which had not yet been done.'²³ The resolution was opposed and defeated by the Bradford delegate, Paul Bland, who argued that such decisions should be left to the discretion of local branches, thereby enshrining in the constitution of the new party both the autonomy of local branches and the recognition of the pivotal role the trade union movement would play in the future of the party.²⁴ The rejection of the 'Fourth Clause' from Manchester was a further recognition of the necessity for a relationship with trade unionism as it paved the way for local societies to form electoral alliances

²² Report of the First Conference of the Independent Labour Party, p. 3. The issue concerning the inclusion of the word socialist in the title of the organisation continued to be debated at every conference up to 1900. It was either defeated or over-ruled on each occasion.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 13-14.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 14. A further implication of the rejection of the 'Fourth Clause' was the distancing which occurred between Robert Blatchford's Clarion movement and the ILP. But once again it must be stressed that this did not preclude the co-operation between the Clarion supporters and the ILP at a local level.

with the Liberal Party, the party with which the leadership of the Trades Union Congress had been associated since the 1860s.²⁵

A problem inherent within the new party concerned the priority given to political representation, for this could lead to parliamentary opportunism and to the containment of socialist aims within a bourgeois institution and mode of operation. In 1894, Keir Hardie, as chairman of the second conference, made it plain that he was aware of the nature of these problems.

He believed the Independent Labour Party had a great opportunity if only, discarding all minor issues, it remembered that it was created for the purpose of realising Socialism - that that was the one item on its programme - and that the means by which it proposed to realise Socialism was the creation of an Independent Labour Party in the House of Commons and in every representative institution. The future was bright with hope for them. The only danger with which they were threatened came from the very success which had attended their efforts. There was in some quarters a tendency to temporise with the great principles they set out to realise in order to capture certain people. Another equally great danger arose from the same cause. The danger was that the men who might be got in by minimising their demands would prove a source of weakness to them when the hour of trial came.²⁶

This strong statement affirming the socialist basis of the ILP led Hardie to conclude that: 'the only serious opposition they had had to encounter had come from men who ought to have occupied an inner place in their councils.'²⁷ This was a clear reference to both the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society and demonstrated that the spirit of

²⁵ See Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism. (1963). Penguin, Harmondsworth 1981. pp. 74-75 and Theodore Rothstein, From Chartism to Labourism. Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement. (1929). Lawrence & Wishart, London 1983. Part Two, Chapter Six.

²⁶ Report of the Second Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party. Manchester 1894. p. 5. BLHE 1880-1900.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

compromise which characterised the formation of the ILP did not extend to either of these two societies.

Hardie's words were spoken at a time, 1894, when further negotiations had been conducted between the National Administrative Council, which was the executive body of the Independent Labour Party, and representatives of the Social Democratic Federation. The purpose of such negotiations was not to bring about fusion between the two bodies but to 'agree upon some plan for harmonious working relations'.²⁸ However, at the Annual Conference of the Social Democratic Federation it was resolved that: 'there can be no need for the separate existence of the I.L.P., on the ground that the proper place for conscious Socialists is inside a revolutionary Socialist organisation such as the Social Democratic Federation.'²⁹ Despite this clear stand, the Social Democratic Federation was soon forced once again to consider fusion with the I.L.P. due to the increasing popularity of the latter organisation.³⁰

In July 1897 an Informal Conference between the two groups was held and a resolution passed which stated that: 'it is desirable in the interests of the Socialist movement, that the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. be united in one organisation, provided it is found that there is no question of principle to keep them apart.'³¹ In spite of the fact that the overwhelming response of

²⁸ 'N.A.C. Second Annual Report'. Report of the Third Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party. ILP, London 1895. p. 17. BLHE 1880-1900.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ At the General Election of 1895 there were twenty-eight I.L.P. candidates compared to only four from the S.D.F. Of the twenty-eight from the I.L.P., twenty-one were trade unionists. See J. Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924 p. 83. Further evidence of the success of the I.L.P. lay with the number of former S.D.F. branches which affiliated to the I.L.P. In many areas, of course, people were often members of both bodies at the same time.

³¹ 'I.L.P. and S.D.F. Fusion'. ILP News. Vol. 1, No. 9, December 1897. p. 7. BLHE 1880-1900.

I.L.P. members canvassed was in favour of fusion with the SDF,³² the National Administrative Council of the ILP, fearing the effect this would have particularly on their relationship with the trade union movement, declared that the response was too small to be representative of general feeling and therefore they decided against fusion, stating that:

We have differed from the SDF almost solely because we have refused to adopt certain rigid propagandist phrases and to cut ourselves off from other sections of the Labour movement, particularly trades-unionism and co-operation, and the advanced elements in the humanitarian movements. The great success of the ILP shows how well its catholic position corresponds to the feelings of the public, and the gradual silencing of particularist critics shows how possible it is for us to work with all these sections and yet be unmistakably Socialist. We believe that if any step is now taken to dissolve the ILP and cut ourselves off from its traditions, the growth of the Socialist movement in this country will receive a serious check.³³

Thus, if the Social Democratic Federation felt unable to work with the Independent Labour Party on the grounds that the latter organisation was not socialist, the Independent Labour Party, in its turn, perceived the Social Democratic Federation as an isolated propaganda organisation which did not understand the traditions of the labour movement in England.

Further complicating these political differences were personality conflicts. Personal differences, especially those between Henry Hyndman³⁴

³² Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the ILP, Hudson & Son, Birmingham 1898. pp. 4-7. BLHE 1880-1900.

³³ *Ibid.* p.7.

³⁴ Hyndman appears to have been treated with suspicion and dislike by most of those who met him. In 1884, Eleanor Marx wrote to her sister saying: 'There has been no end of petty intriguing within that body of late [the SDF]...besides some very nasty personal affairs...So far [Hyndman] has things here much his own way, but he is playing his cards very badly, irritating everyone, and his little game will soon be played out. The sooner the better for our movement. It has *every* chance here at this present time if only we had better leaders than Hyndman and his henchmen.' Quoted in Yvonne Kapp, Eleanor Marx. Volume II The Crowded Years 1884-1898. Virago, London 1979. p. 57. Engels saw Hyndman as 'a political adventurer' who was trying 'to buy up the whole movement'. *Ibid.* p. 58.

of the SDF and men like Keir Hardie, played an important role in preventing fusion between the two groups.³⁵ Tom Mann, who, unlike Hardie, was a member of the SDF, found Hyndman's style contradictory:

In the early days of open-air propaganda - for he took his turn regularly at outdoor gatherings as well as indoor - his essential bourgeois appearance attracted much attention. The tall hat, the frock coat, and the long beard often drew the curious-minded who would not have spent time listening to one in working-men's attire. Hyndman always gave the unadulterated Social Democratic doctrine, as propounded by the Social Democratic Federation...He cleverly criticized the workmen listening to him for not being able to see through the machinations of those members of the master class, closely associated with the church or politics, or both..Hyndman, like many strong personalities, had very pronounced likes and dislikes...I am convinced, however, that Hyndman's bourgeois mentality made it impossible for him to estimate the worth of industrial organization correctly.³⁶

These differences in temperament did, at times, obscure areas of agreement.³⁷

As well as the question of alliances between the various other socialist groups, each apparently pursuing their own agenda, the Independent Labour Party was faced with the difficult problem of formulating a programme which was essentially different from those proposed by radicals within both the major parties. In turn, this meant being able to detach working men from their prior affiliation to either the Liberals or the Conservatives. At the same time, however, such a programme needed to accord with the lived experience of those very workers. It is important here not to underestimate what an enormous undertaking this was for the ILP; trying as

³⁵ See Kenneth O. Morgan, Keir Hardie, Radical and Socialist, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1984. pp. 87-90 for a description both of Hardie's reaction to Hyndman and of the various moves towards fusion.

³⁶ Tom Mann. Memoirs. (1923). MacGibbon & Kee, London 1967. pp. 26-27.

³⁷ However much the Fabians and the Social Democratic Federation protested to the contrary, the policy of the ILP concerning the collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange did commit the party to a socialist programme.

it was to steer a treacherous course between the Scylla of the radicals and the Charybdis of the often reactionary leadership of the Trades Union Congress. This undertaking was itself made even more difficult by the first-past-the-post system in general elections which clearly favoured a two-party system; and by the registration process which demanded that electoral registers be drawn up twice a year with the costs to be borne by the parties. According to Engels these procedures amounted to 'a direct denial of the eligibility of working-class candidates in three-fourths or more of the constituencies'.³⁸

In September 1891 the Liberal Party, trying to recover from the damaging Unionist split over Irish Home Rule in 1886 when Joseph Chamberlain led a number of radicals into the Conservative Party, put forward its Newcastle Programme. It contained a little bit of something for everyone: 'for the Irish, Home Rule; for the Celtic fringe and the Nonconformists, Scottish and Welsh disestablishment; for the unions, an employers' liability bill to compensate workers injured in industrial accidents; for the countryside, new parish councils and land for allotments; for the temperance lobby, local option on whether or not to sell liquor; for the Lib-Labs, payment of MPs; for the democrats, one-man-one-vote and triennial parliaments'.³⁹ This was followed, in November 1892, by the publication of Joseph Chamberlain's article in The Nineteenth Century on 'The Labour Question'. In this he declaimed equally against 'the self-constituted representative of Labour' and 'the optimists who persistently act on the theory that this is the best of all possible worlds'. Instead, he put forward a radical programme arguing that: 'if we would ward off revolutionary violence or dangerous legislation,

³⁸ Engels to Sorge. Letter dated May 12, 1894. Marx and Engels on Britain. op.cit. p.p. 535-536. See also David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1983. pp. 129-132.

³⁹ Michael Bentley, Politics Without Democracy 1815-1914. Fontana, London 1984. pp. 281-282.

we must be ready to accept all practicable proposals for still further ameliorating the condition of the great masses of the people'.⁴⁰ To realise this process of amelioration, Chamberlain advanced a programme of eight proposals. Firstly, that hours of labour be reduced for miners and those engaged in dangerous trades. Secondly, local enforcement of trade regulations for the earlier closing of shops. Thirdly, the establishment of arbitration tribunals for disputes. Fourthly, compensation for those injured and the dependants of those killed at work, providing that it was not the fault of those so injured or killed. Fifthly, old age pensions for the deserving poor. Sixthly, the limitation and control of pauper immigration. Seventhly, greater powers be given to local authorities for civic improvements and the provision of better housing for workers. And, finally, that local authorities be empowered to lend money to workers so that they may purchase their own homes.⁴¹ An analysis of these proposals shows a curious mixture of old and new thinking that characterised Chamberlain's own brand of radicalism. Words such as the 'deserving poor' hark back to the utilitarian principles behind the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834; whilst limitation upon hours worked, albeit for only a minority of the working population, indicates a shift towards greater state intervention in the labour process.

In his response to Chamberlain's article Keir Hardie referred to him as an 'astute front-bench politician on the hunt for votes...awakening to a consciousness of the fact that there is a Labour vote in existence which is worth catering for'⁴² and went on to argue that 'if in what follows I do not agree with Mr. Chamberlain's proposals, it is because I believe these would

⁴⁰ Joseph Chamberlain, 'The Labour Question'. The Nineteenth Century. Vol. XXXII, No. 189. November 1892. p. 678.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 707.

⁴² Keir Hardie, 'Mr. Chamberlain's Programme (3)'. The Nineteenth Century Vol. XXXII. No. 190. December 1892. p. 883.

perpetuate and probably aggravate some of the evils of the system with which we are at war'.⁴³ Two years later, Hardie argued that it was precisely in its desire to abolish, and not ameliorate, the 'evils of the system' that the independence of Labour lay.

It will be noted that the programme of the party is in no sense of the word political...There is good reason for this omission of political items from the programme. Were such to be included, the attention of the men would be divided between the political and the social reforms, and it would always be possible for the Radical Party to point out that it was prepared to go as far as we were politically, and that would be a strong argument in favour of some working alliance or agreement with that party. The programme, as framed, however, excludes the possibility of such a contention, and concentrates the attention of the members on questions which have a direct bearing on the social and economic well-being of the workers. To this one fact as much as any other is to be attributed the remarkable growth and development of the movement.⁴⁴

In 1895, then, independence for the Independent Labour Party, as far as Hardie was concerned, lay not so much in supporting constitutional reforms such as the abolition of the House of Lords,⁴⁵ but rather in presenting a programme of social and industrial reforms. Hardie's reasons for this were clearly set out. In the first place, the ILP had to distinguish itself from both Liberal and Conservative radicalism, as set out in the Newcastle Programme and in Chamberlain's article. In the second place, the working class was divided in its support between the Liberals and the Conservatives; any anti-constitutional measure, whilst appealing to those who supported the Liberals, was bound to alienate those workers who supported the Tories. The only way to unite these two, disparate groups was to promote those issues in which all workers had a vested interest, such as the hours and

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 885.

⁴⁴ Keir Hardie, 'The Independent Labour Party'. *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXXVII. No. 215. January 1895. p. 9.

⁴⁵ As Samuel Story and Sir James Joicey had suggested. See *ibid.* p. 10.

conditions of labour.⁴⁶ The critical factor in this push towards unification was the role of the trade union movement.

By 1899, however, Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald were so convinced of the bankruptcy of Liberalism as both a political party and as a philosophy that they could write: 'we can now afford to identify ourselves with those questions of immediate reform upon which Radicals and Socialists are alike agreed, with less fear of allowing our aim to be obscured and the party to be swallowed up in the ranks of the shiftless opportunist, whose programme changes from day to day and from constituency to constituency.'⁴⁷ Thus, in the space of a mere four years, a quite marked shift in thought had occurred within the Independent Labour Party; from a clear policy of independence from all other political parties and factions to one which, if not openly admitting alliance with radicals, pointed in that direction. To emphasise the ILP's role as the natural successor to Liberalism, rather than an entirely different form of political representation, Hardie and MacDonald spoke of it as being 'in the true line of the progressive apostolic succession'.⁴⁸ Moreover, this repudiation of political alternatives other than that of political representation within the constitution also involved a repudiation of the "foreignness" of socialism:

our originality consists rather in the width of our application of old principles than in the discovery of new ones. The conservation of energy which is the base of family life, and which is the secret of success in the most flourishing businesses, can, we believe, be applied to national life and needs with the same happy results. That is the whole of our discovery. We emphasise this point because it shifts the basis of Socialism to a foundation that is more stable than that upon which it is often supposed to rest. Socialism and the Marxian theory of

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 9-10.

⁴⁷ Keir Hardie & Ramsay MacDonald, 'The Liberal Collapse III. The Independent Labour Party's Programme'. *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol XLV. No. 263. January 1899. p. 27.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 25.

value are often regarded as inseparable; but if Marx's position in economics became untenable to-morrow, the case for Socialism as an improved system of production and distribution would not be touched. The waste and inefficiency of commercialism, the economy and efficiency of co-operation, can be proved without a single reference to Marx.⁴⁹

The language used in this article is striking. Gone are all references to the making of a new world and a new society. Instead, socialism is presented as an improvement upon the old, a more efficient system. Furthermore, as Hardie and MacDonald make clear, this efficiency was to be achieved through greater state control - the nature of the state itself was not in question. To understand how this crucial shift occurred it is necessary to look at the development of the trade union movement.

From the middle years of the century, trade unionism had experienced slow, if unspectacular, progress. In 1851 the Amalgamated Society of Engineers was founded to mark the beginning of what Beatrice and Sidney Webb called "new model" unionism. What marked this organisation off from those which had gone before were a number of features such as its high rate of contributions and corresponding benefits for sickness and other mishaps. These high contributions meant that its membership was composed of craft workers enjoying stable employment. The ASE was followed in 1860 by the formation of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners and also by that of the London Trades Council. Further growth of "new model" unionism was encouraged by legislative changes. In 1855 the Friendly Societies Act gave legal protection to societies which provided benefits for their members and in 1859 the Molestation of Workmen Act exempted peaceful picketing during disputes over hours and wages from the charges of molestation and obstruction.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 32.

Trade union action was not solely industrial though, the London Trades Council, under the leadership of Robert Applegarth had been active in the Reform League which assisted in the passage of the second Reform Act in 1867. In that year, too, the Master and Servant Act was passed which somewhat ameliorated the iniquitous situation whereby an employee could be imprisoned for breach of contract whilst an employer was merely subject to civil action. All these gains were impressive, but they were also extremely precarious as the *Hornby v. Close* decision showed.⁵⁰ However, in 1868 the Trades Union Congress was formed and one year later the Royal Commission into trade unionism published its Majority and Minority Reports, the latter being extremely favourable to unionism. The result was that in 1871 the Trade Union Act gave legal recognition to unions and also protected their funds under the Friendly Societies Act. But the Criminal Law Amendment Act of the same year prohibited peaceful picketing. Thus, whilst trade unionism made progress during the third quarter of the century, it was not unilinear; measures gained through one Act could be abolished by another. It is this particular group of workers – the craft workers who were members of the new model unions, participated in insurance schemes and belonged to such organisations as the Mechanics' Institutes – who have been identified as comprising a "labour aristocracy".

Historians are generally agreed that the third quarter of the nineteenth century represented a period of relative quietude; relative, that is, to the preceding fifty years. Substantial disagreement, however, has emerged over how to interpret this period. Much of the debate surrounds the concept of an "aristocracy of labour", its role in class formation and the part it played in the failure of socialism in Britain. Whilst this is a concept which has been

⁵⁰ This was a decision which resulted from an attempt by the Boilermakers' Society to sue the treasurer of its Bradford branch for £4 which he owed. The Boilermakers had assumed that their funds were protected under the Friendly Societies Act. However, the judges declared that trade unions were not covered by the Act because they were still illegal organisations. See H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, pp. 65-66.

hotly debated both within and without Marxist circles, particularly over the last twenty-five years, it is complicated by the fact that it was a term used by contemporaries. The situation is even further complicated by periodisation; some historians have projected it back to the middle years of the century, whilst others, following Lenin, place it firmly during the years of imperialist endeavour, from roughly 1890 to the failure of the Second International. Others still reject the notion of an "aristocracy of labour" altogether for analytical purposes.⁵¹

One of the major exponents of the labour aristocracy thesis was, and remains, Eric Hobsbawm. In his chapter 'The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth-Century Britain', first published in 1954, he gave six factors which determined membership of this group: the level and regularity of a worker's earnings; his prospects of social security; his conditions of work; his social relations with those above and below; his general living conditions; and his future prospects and those of his children. Of all these factors Hobsbawm found the first to be the most important.⁵² Thus far, the thesis is relatively straightforward. The difficulties arise, however, when political and social attitudes are read off from this economic description. According to Hobsbawm, 'the political and economic positions of the labour aristocracy reflect one another with uncanny accuracy'.⁵³ Thus, the labour

⁵¹ There exist many articles on the labour aristocracy. But for useful summaries of the debate see Robert Gray, The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain c. 1850-1914 Macmillan, London 1981; Gregor McLennan, Marxism and the Methodologies of History, Verso, London 1981. pp. 206-233; R. J. Morris, 'The Labour Aristocracy in the British Class Structure', in Anne Digby & Charles Feinstein, eds., New Directions in Economic and Social History, Macmillan, London 1989; H. F. Moorhouse, 'The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy', Social History, Vol.3. No. 1. 1978.; and John Field, 'British Historians and the Concept of the Labour Aristocracy', Radical History Review 19. 1978-79. For an example of one who rejects the concept altogether see Henry Pelling, 'The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy', in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, Macmillan, London 1986.

⁵² Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1964. p. 273.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 287.

aristocracy formed 'a distinctive upper strata of the working class, better paid, better treated and generally regarded as more "respectable" and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat'.⁵⁴ Much of the evidence for this relationship between politics and economics is impressionistic and appears to derive, in the first instance, from a letter Engels wrote to Marx in 1858 in which he said: 'the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as* a bourgeoisie'.⁵⁵

Twenty years after his earlier chapter, Hobsbawm has written of working-class stratification between 1850 and 1880 as:

the joint product of an archaic form of industrialization and of the value-system of a confident liberal bourgeoisie, which became dominant as counter-ideologies lost their hold among the working classes with the decline of the pre-1848 mass movements - and of economic expansion....The labour aristocracy was 'respectable' - a key term in the social vocabulary of nineteenth-century Britain. It was flattered by the ruling class as 'the intelligent artisans', and indeed, the feebleness of a petite-bourgeoisie of the continental type...made the 'artisans' the core of what was sometimes described as the 'lower middle class'. And yet, as recent research has shown once more, it saw itself as a working class, even in some respects as the spokesmen and leaders of the rest of the manual workers. And necessarily so, because its economic advantages and status depended on the capacity to organize in trade unions, in consumer cooperative societies, in societies of mutual aid and insurance. By these means, and *only* by these means, could it maintain the relative exclusiveness which separated it from 'the labourers', and safeguarded itself to some extent against insecurity. It was existentially linked to those below it, though it had to keep them at bay.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 272.

⁵⁵ Engels, letter to Marx October 7, 1858. Marx and Engels On Britain, pp. 491-492.

⁵⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Formation of British Working-Class Culture', in Worlds of Labour. Further Studies in the History of Labour, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1984, pp. 182-183.

This later explanation of Hobsbawm's is an attempt to clarify earlier mechanistic accounts. The labour aristocracy here is seen as recognisably part of the working class, as inextricably bound to those workers beneath it as in relation to the bourgeoisie above it. Bourgeois ideological hegemony is therefore negotiated rather than imposed from above.⁵⁷ Thus Hobsbawm rejects the 'Leninist' notion of the labour aristocracy having been bribed, 'bought off' or incorporated by the bourgeoisie.⁵⁸ Indeed, he now also rejects any notion that there is a direct relationship between the existence of a labour aristocracy and the reformist nature of the labour movement, although he does not deny that the former exhibited reformist tendencies.⁵⁹ What he is objecting to is the notion that there existed a stratum of the working class - the proletariat - which was inherently more revolutionary than any other. Moreover, he argues with great force that, regardless of interpretations, it has been established empirically by a number of studies that a labour aristocracy did exist.⁶⁰

Hobsbawm's later work appears to accord to a large extent with recent research on the relationship between politics and the labour process, even though these latter researchers tend to dismiss the use of the term labour aristocracy in any but a purely descriptive sense. They have taken up Hobsbawm's suggestion that: 'By implication, rather than explicitly, it [the labour aristocracy debate] is also a debate about the specific character of British industrial development, and therefore about the "making" and the

⁵⁷ See Hobsbawm's article 'Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement' in Revolutionaries. Contemporary Essays. Quartet Books, London 1977. pp. 97-98 where he argues that embourgeoisement for Marx meant the adaptation of the labour movement to the bourgeois system, not its absorption.

⁵⁸ E. Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour p. 216.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 221-223

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 217. The studies he mentions are Robert Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976 and Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880 Croom Helm, London 1978.

transformations of the working class within it'.⁶¹ Richard Price, for example, looks at how the uneven development of industrialisation disrupted social relations, offering independence for some workers, subordination for others. Because this was a process which continued throughout the nineteenth century, class formation was constantly being re-made. Thus, there was no one class experience: 'it is the tension and friction within these formations that provides them with their dynamic quality, so that, rather than being fixed, immutable expressions of equilibrium, they are in an almost constant state of movement and renegotiation.'⁶² Similarly, Patrick Joyce, in his work contrasting the textile industries in Yorkshire and Lancashire, has argued:

Because of their different industrial structure and political histories the transition to class-based Labour party politics, and the outcome of that transition, were to differ considerably between Lancashire and the West Riding. Because each region began this process from differing levels in the formation of mass class consciousness, the nature of the outcome - the character of the new politics - was to reflect the initial difference strongly...[L]ater and less complete mechanisation, and thus the more primitive organisation of industry and of industrial relations, meant that the culture of the factory cut less deeply to the east of the Pennines, employer paternalism and the operatives' answering response less effectively sealing the society off from class antagonism. A major consequence of these differences was that in the West Riding working-class political organisation took precedence over trade union organisation, the Chartist political inheritance continuing as a vital presence in a radical tradition which reached more deeply into popular life than was the case in Lancashire.⁶³

⁶¹ Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour pp. 225-226.

⁶² Richard Price, Labour in British Society. Croom Helm, London 1986. p. 11.

⁶³ Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of The Factory In Later Victorian England. Harvester Press, Brighton 1980. p. 331.

The key factor in the work of both Price and Joyce is that of paternalism.⁶⁴ Paternalism provides one of the answers to the questions of mid-Victorian stabilisation and to the later relationship between the trade union movement and socialist politics; it also provides a bridge between the 'moral economy' of rights asserted by artisanal radicalism noted within the Chartist movement and the political economy of classical *laissez-faire* liberalism which had been counterposed in the first half of the century. As Richard Price has shown paternalism was complex and contradictory: 'The ironic truth was that the paternal style could only be compatible with liberal individualism if it directed its purpose towards stimulating and encouraging self-help and independent action. That is, paternal feelings could only be aroused voluntarily; to coerce would be counterproductive. Thus, the "independence" of working men had to be recognised and respected.'⁶⁵ What this involved was a shift away from the conflict which had characterised the 1830s and 1840s towards a negotiated compromise of the mid-Victorian period which saw working-class independence expressed through the morally up-lifting agencies of self-help institutions and trade unions.

What made paternalism contradictory was that the most autonomous workers of all - the sweated outworkers working in their own homes - were 'in fact, perverse representations of dependence'.⁶⁶ At the other end of the workforce lay the skilled craftworkers, who, through control over entry to their trade, were able to exercise a more complete autonomy over the labour

⁶⁴ There are, however, differences between these two writers, especially over the degree of conflict and compromise between workers and capitalists. See Richard Price, 'The Labour Process and Labour History'. *Social History*. Vol. 8, No. 1. January 1983; Patrick Joyce, 'Labour, Capital and Compromise: A Response To Richard Price'. *Social History*. Vol. 9, No. 1. January 1984; Richard Price, 'Conflict and Co-operation: A Reply To Patrick Joyce'. *Social History*. Vol. 9, No. 2. May 1984; and Patrick Joyce, 'Languages of Reciprocity and Conflict: A Further Response To Richard Price'. *Social History*. Vol. 9, No. 2. May 1984.

⁶⁵ Richard Price, *Labour In British Society*. p. 64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 74.

process. It is within this group, Price suggests, that the limits to paternalism exhibited itself, primarily because of their trade union activities.⁶⁷ It is here that the "labour aristocracy" thesis, in any but a purely descriptive sense, tends to break down. Paternalism affected all sectors of the working class but it did so unevenly. As both Price and Joyce's work shows, it was those workers who were most in control of their labour process who were also most likely to retain their links with Chartist radicalism. Indeed, as Sheila Rowbotham has said in regard to Sheffield, where small-scale workshop production still prevailed in the 1880s, and as we have seen in regard also to Bristol, many of those responsive to the socialist revival were skilled workers. This is not to deny that reformism was not rife within the working class - paternalist ideology, however much a product of negotiation, did represent a turning away from conflict towards compromise - but it does suggest that some sectors of the working class, by virtue of their degree of real autonomy, were more able to express a class consciousness than others.

Paternalism finally broke down under the weight of pressures towards the end of the century when mechanisation was completed in some industries, piece work was substituted and the labour process itself was further intensified under the pressure of falling profit rates and increased international competition. In addition, the composition of the labour force experienced some quite dramatic structural changes, some industries declined absolutely and others were expanding. Thus, the male labour force engaged in agriculture declined from almost 1.8 million in 1851 to just over 1.3 million in 1901. The expanding sectors included transport, mining, the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 84-85.

metal industries and commercial occupations.⁶⁸ What this involved, as James Hinton has said, was 'a major shift from worse to better paid jobs, from less to more regular employment'.⁶⁹ The locus of skilled work reflected this structural change, away from traditional crafts such as cabinetmaking and the top sector of industries such as cotton, and towards engineering and the metal industries.⁷⁰ What this also meant was that the artisan/labourer dyad broke down and workers were recomposed into the now familiar three grades of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. These structural changes had an impact upon women's work as well: the number of women engaged in public administration increased from 3,000 in 1851 to 29,000 in 1901; in professional occupations the increase was from 103,000 to 326,000; and in the manufactured food industry the increase was from 53,000 to 216,000.⁷¹ It is important to understand here that paternalism was not restricted to the relations of the workplace; it spread throughout society and was expressed through social and cultural institutions as much as through industrial relations.⁷² Paternalism was as much a political response to industrialisation and its attendant problems as it was an economic response. Thus, the structural changes which occurred in the last

⁶⁸ See B. R. Mitchell & Phyllis Deane, Abstracts of British Historical Statistics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1971. p. 60. Thus in the period 1851-1901, transport grew from 433,000 to 1,409,000; mining from 383,000 to 931,000; the metal industries from 536,000 to 1,485,000; and commercial occupations from 91,000 to 597,000. These figures are for male workers only.

⁶⁹ James Hinton, Labour and Socialism. A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974, Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex 1983. p. 26.

⁷⁰ See Gregory Anderson, 'Some Aspects of the Labour Market in Britain c. 1870-1914', in C. J. Wrigley, ed., A History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914, Harvester Press, Brighton 1982. pp. 2-3.

⁷¹ Figures cited in B. R. Mitchell & Phyllis Deane, op. cit. p. 60. What we can see is a workforce increasingly divided by gender; women's involvement in all branches of the transport industry was slight and there was a decline also in their participation in mining.

⁷² See Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics. Especially Chapter 4.

quarter of the nineteenth century necessitated new social relations and political responses.

It could be argued that paternalism was an integral part of the bourgeois gendered ideology spoken of earlier. Yet Price's work has little to say about the gendered nature of paternalism and its specific effects upon women as workers. Joyce, on the other hand, has argued that: 'There is, perhaps, no more suggestive conjunction than the paternalism of the factory regime and the employer dynasty, and the paternalism of the operative family.' And he goes on to suggest that the growth of women's trade unionism in the textile trades was a major factor in the disintegration of paternalism.⁷³ Paternalism was constructed upon specific notions of what comprised masculinity and femininity, which were themselves intimately bound up with independence and subordination. Thus the politics of work, the social relations of production and definitions of skill were all inherently gendered. It is this relationship between gender, work and trade unionism which will be examined next.

At the Leicester Conference of the Trades Union Congress in 1877, in reply to representations made by some women delegates against further restrictions upon female labour under the proposed Factories and Workshops Bill, Henry Broadhurst⁷⁴, the secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, declared:

They knew it was very natural for ladies to be impatient of restraint at any time (Laughter.) - and therefore they might imagine the uneasiness which would be created when the law of the nation prescribed rules and regulations...Much good had been done by Mrs. Paterson and other ladies, in forming and maintaining unions, but they would never be able to lift

⁷³ Ibid. p. 115.

⁷⁴ Henry Broadhurst, 1840-1911, was a stonemason by trade. He was secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC from 1875 and was a Liberal M.P. for almost the whole period from 1880-1906. See his entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 2. Macmillan, London 1974, pp. 62-68.

woman to her proper sphere unless they had some restrictions put upon the greed of those who would work their mothers or sisters like dogs or slaves for the sake of gain. (Applause.) There was another phase of it; they had the future of their country and children to consider, and it was their duty as men and husbands to use their utmost efforts to bring about a condition of things where their wives should be in their proper sphere at home, seeing after their house and family, instead of being dragged into the competition for livelihood against the great and strong men of the world.⁷⁵

Leaving aside the question as to whether Broadhurst's attitude towards protective legislation for women workers was typical or not,⁷⁶ I believe his statement is of note for its articulation of a specific masculinity.

It is a powerful illustration of the extent to which the gendered ideology of women and the family, which had been so cogently argued by the Evangelicals in the 1800s, had not merely penetrated organised sections of the working class but was deeply entrenched within those sections. This was not the case of the filtering down of middle-class ideas to the working class. As stated above, paternalism was constantly negotiated and renegotiated throughout the nineteenth century. Broadhurst's statement reflected the lived experience of the skilled worker who, through the steady progress trade unionism had made since the 1850s and the period of prosperity which accompanied that progress, found that within gendered ideology, as an integral part of the paternalism of the workplace, was encapsulated his own aspirations. His argument for the separation of

⁷⁵ Speech reported in the Women's Union Journal, Vol.2, No.21, October 1877. p. 72. WTUL Papers.

⁷⁶ As Keith McClelland has written: 'If it is clear that women have generally been either excluded from whole occupations or restricted to low-paid and low status jobs within particular trades, there is no single factor, such as the exclusionary policies of trade unions, that will do for all cases. The determination of gender differences in paid employment certainly includes employers' strategies, the relative weakness and strength of men and women in the labour market and households, the relative strength of workers' organisations, cultural presuppositions about what jobs men and women should be doing, and the transmission of knowledge and training necessary for particular kinds of jobs.' 'Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the "Representative Artisan" in Britain, 1850-1880'. Gender and History. Vol.1. No. 2. Summer 1989. p. 168.

spheres for women and men was both the conscious expression of a belief in the innate differences between the sexes and a reflection of the material progress of the skilled worker.

Secondly, Broadhurst's statement is noteworthy for the connections it made between separate spheres for men and women, and independence. Independence has many different meanings. In the context in which it was used by Broadhurst it represented a statement of classical political economy; freedom from state interference, and an aggressive individualism. Yet it also suggested collectivity - the ability of strong workers to bargain directly with employers for wages and conditions of work. Independence was thus at one and the same time the expression of a strong individualist masculine identity and of a collective class consciousness, however limited and sectional that may have been. But if independence was associated with masculinity its obverse, dependence, was associated with femininity.

At the TUC ten years later, in 1887, Clementina Black,⁷⁷ representing the Women's Protective and Provident League, argued that tales of exploitation concerning the work of women chain makers at Cradley Heath could be capped:

by a worse story of the sufferings of women employed in trades which no one dreams of forbidding, such as needlework and match-box making. But men never propose to interfere with these trades? Why not? There was no need to ask. Men did not work at these trades and suffered nothing from the competition of women. The real point to be complained of was the low rate of payment earned by the women; and the way to prevent the employment of women in any trade they were unfit for was for men to join in helping them to combine in order that

⁷⁷ Clementina Black, 1853-1922, became secretary of the Women's Protective and Provident League in 1886. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Women's Industrial Council in 1894. Her other political activities included membership of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, whose journal the Common Cause she edited for a while. She was a writer by profession and the sister of Constance Garnett, the translator of Russian novels. See her entry in Jennifer S. Uglow, ed., The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography. Macmillan, London 1984. pp. 59-60.

they might receive the same wages for the same work. If employers have to pay women the same prices as men, there would be no temptation to them to employ women to do what they were less fit to do than men. But the women were not represented here to speak for themselves, and she protested against the attempt of one class of workers - especially a class whose interests were concerned - to impose restrictions upon another class of workers.⁷⁸

The point which Black was eager to stress was that protective legislation was proposed only in those areas where women and men competed directly for work. What was deemed women's work, in other words that which was not done by men, was not considered to need protection. If we shift the focus away from the issue of protection, however, it is possible to advance an alternative explanation, which is concerned with independence and dependence. The women workers at Cradley Heath were highly visible, their work was performed outside the home whilst that of needlewomen was not. Moreover, needlework carried overtones of gentility. It was commensurate with notions of suitable occupations for middle-class women, rather than with paid employment. It was, therefore, also "respectable" work. This is an important point because, as Keith McClelland has said: 'The factory women of Lancashire had long been attacked by moralists for their "independence", although the terms of this attack were always bound up with the notion of their being sexually threatening in a way in which independent men were not. On the contrary, the independent and respectable man was usually assumed to be a paragon of sexual virtue.'⁷⁹ In this context, Broadhurst's support for social purity movements is as significant as his stance as a trade unionist.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Women's Union Journal, Vol.12, No.141, October 15 1887. pp76-77. WTUL Papers.

⁷⁹ K. McClelland, op. cit. p. 171.

⁸⁰ See Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class, and The State. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1980. p. 101.

Broadhurst was certainly an extreme example of the degree to which paternalism had been internalised by workers. Beatrice Webb, in her usual condescending way described him as: 'A commonplace person, hard-working no doubt, but a middle-class philistine to the backbone, appealing to the practical shrewdness and the high-flown but mediocre sentiments of the comfortably off working-man. His view of women is typical of all his other views: he lives in platitudes and commonplaces.'⁸¹ Broadhurst was also significantly out of touch with the rank and file of his own union, the Stonemasons, which had, by 1889, declared in favour of the universal eight-hour day.⁸² Nevertheless, his assertion of masculinity and independence cannot be dismissed as aberrant. Broadhurst was very much a man of his times, coming from a generation who started work in the 1850s. It is within this generation that the concept of masculinity developed by gendered ideology and consolidated by the *laissez-faire* philosophy of liberalism was cemented by the social relations of paternalism. It promulgated a masculine subjectivity - 'the great and strong men of the world' - which, in its own way, was every bit as impoverished and one-sided as that accorded to women.

There was, as Saville, has said, nothing inevitable about this process whereby sectors of the working class took on board - however mediated - some of the values and politics of bourgeois society.⁸³ It arose in the specific historical context of mid-Victorian England and thus points to the possibilities open to working-class action. We have already seen how trade unionism made slow progress, with gains won by one Act being lost by

⁸¹ Norman & Jeanne MacKenize, eds., The Diaries of Beatrice Webb. Volume One 1873-1892. Virago, London 1982. p. 293.

⁸² See A. E. P. Duffy, 'New Unionism in Britain, 1889-1890: A Reappraisal'. Economic History Review. Vol. XIV, No. 2. 1961. pp. 313-314.

⁸³ John Saville, 'The Ideology of Labourism', in R. Benewick, R. N. Berki & B. Parekh, eds., Knowledge and Belief in Politics. George Allen & Unwin, London 1973. p. 222.

another. Trade unionism, therefore, was necessarily defensive. It was not, however, as Richard Price has written, the result of 'truncated development' nor was it 'the moment when the British working class jumped the rails of its natural, historical destiny'.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, towards the end of the 1880s, Broadhurst's views on state intervention were becoming increasingly anachronistic. This does not mean that socialism had successfully penetrated the trade union movement. As David Howell has argued, it was those workers, such as the Yorkshire textile workers, who because of their lack of a tradition of unionism, were most likely to seek redress through political action, whereas the Lancashire cotton workers, who did have a long tradition of unionism, did not affiliate to the Labour Representation Committee until 1903 and it was not until 1909 that the miners affiliated.⁸⁵ Nor does this mean that the Trades Union Congress was becoming more favourable to socialism. In 1895 the introduction of the bloc vote, the denial of representation to local trades councils and the termination of delegate status to all except those working at their trade or were paid officials of their unions represented a significant blow for socialists.⁸⁶ It did mean, however, that the economic circumstances of the 1880s, the structural changes in the workforce and the apparent bankruptcy of liberalism forced a change in policy on the part of the TUC towards acceptance of state intervention.⁸⁷

The formation of a class consciousness which was specifically informed by socialist and feminist ideas was dependent in great part upon the effectiveness of both socialists and feminists in bringing their ideas to

⁸⁴ R. Price, Labour in British Society, p. 83.

⁸⁵ See D. Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party. Part 1, Chapter 3 & Part 2, Chapters 8 & 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 125-126. Ironically, this measure also removed Broadhurst from the TUC.

⁸⁷ See Duffy, 'New Unionism In Britain, 1889-1890: A Reappraisal'. pp. 313-315.

bear upon the working class. One of the crucial issues of this chapter concerns the relative failure of those socialist groups which were in existence in the 1880s and 1890s - the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, the Fabians and, to varying degrees, the Independent Labour Party - to extend their ideas into the realm of everyday existence and practice of the working class through the trade union movement.

Contained within the elements which together comprised the reformist mentality of the trade union movement lies an explanation for the explicit hostility which both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League exhibited towards that movement. The SDF's hostile attitude can be further explained by the fact that it regarded itself as the only 'true' Marxist organisation in England and therefore adopted an attitude of superiority towards other socialist and labour groups.⁸⁸ Edward Carpenter recalled that they used to chaff Hyndman 'because at every crisis in the industrial situation he was confident that the Millennium was at hand - that the S.D.F. would resolve itself into a Committee of Public Safety, and that it would be for him as Chairman of that body to guide the ship of the State into the calm haven of Socialism!'⁸⁹ One result of this sense of superiority was the tendency for the SDF to regard itself as the only possible leader of the working class, and therefore to dictate the terms of the struggle to the trade union movement.

The fact is that you make friends with the employing and exploiting class instead of regarding the class - not individual members of it - as the foes of labour. You wish Labour and Capital to be placed on an equality...WORKERS OF ENGLAND, whether you are Trades Unionists or not, in that word, TYRANNY, is the whole of the real question of the reminder of what the Trade Unions have forgotten. They make no

⁸⁸ See Henry Collins, 'The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation', in Asa Briggs & John Saville, eds., *Essays in Labour History*, Vol. 2. Macmillan, London 1971. pp. 47-69.

⁸⁹ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*. (1916). George Allen & Unwin, London 1921. p. 246.

reference to the internecine struggle that is and must be between Labour and Capital as it is now. They have proclaimed by silence a truce when there is no truce. They do not tell the workers, they try to forget themselves, that there is to-day a tyranny of the middle-class over the working-class more terrible than that of king, aristocrat, or church, in any time or in any country.⁹⁰

Whilst condemning the ethos and the leadership of the trade union movement the SDF did accept that palliative measures, as they commonly called legislative reforms, were necessary prior to the attainment of a socialist society, and these were embodied in its manifesto, Socialism Made Plain.

As stepping-stones to a happier period, we urge for immediate adoption:- The COMPULSORY CONSTRUCTION of healthy artisans' and agricultural labourers' dwellings...FREE COMPULSORY EDUCATION for all classes...EIGHT HOURS or less to be the normal WORKING DAY in all trades. CUMULATIVE TAXATION upon all incomes above a fixed minimum not exceeding £300 a year. STATE APPROPRIATION OF RAILWAYS...The establishment of NATIONAL PARKS...NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.⁹¹

The recognition that such palliative measures would provide a transitional period before the advent of socialism also led the SDF to agitate for parliamentary representation for the working class. Accordingly, the Federation was extremely active amongst the demonstrations of the unemployed in London in the 1880s, and sought political representation on local councils. The attitude of the SDF to the trade unions was a curious mixture of patronage and encouragement. Whilst it frequently argued that 'to advocate a strike...would, under present conditions, be absolute madness',⁹² it also acknowledged that 'any Social-Democrat who was in the

⁹⁰ 'The Social Democratic Federation To The Trades Unions Of Great Britain, September 1884'. Justice. Vol. 1, No.34, September 6 1884. p. 5. BLHE 1880-1900.

⁹¹ Socialism Made Plain The Modern Press, London 1883. pp. 7-8. BLHE 1880-1900.

⁹² Harry Quelch, Trade-Unionism, Co-operation, and Social Democracy. Twentieth Century Press, London 1891. p. 8. SDF Leaflets and Pamphlets 1883-1931. 1891/4.

position of being able to be a member of a trade union and remained outside of it, was failing in his duty to the cause'.⁹³

Having formed itself on the basis that capitalism would inevitably crumble under the weight of its own contradictions and that with each successive industrial crisis the year of proletarian emancipation was creeping ever closer, the SDF necessarily viewed strikes as a dissipation of the energy and funds needed to prepare the workers for the coming revolution. There appears to be here a contradiction between support for palliative measures and condemnation of strike action, which could be interpreted as the SDF encouraging collaboration with the existing system at the same time as it was declaring such action futile. This contradiction was resolved within the SDF by making a clear distinction between political and industrial action. The former would 'introduce some measure which shall improve the physical, moral and intellectual condition of our own countrymen, and thus...provide in the future stronger and abler forces to fight the battle of the people'.⁹⁴ On the other hand:

Trade Unionism is not, for the unskilled worker, so much a weapon for fighting the capitalists as a means for securing a weapon wherewith to fight them. The utility of the "New Unionism" lies less in the little gains of wages or leisure it has secured for the worker - of which, on the first opportunity, they may be deprived - than in its political effects. It represents the workers as a political force.⁹⁵

This sharp division within the thought of the SDF concerning political and industrial action occurred at a time when this distinction no longer

⁹³ Ibid. p. 4.

⁹⁴ H. M. Hyndman, 'The Progress of Socialism' Justice. Vol. 1, No. 38, October 4 1884. p. 4. BLHE 1880-1900.

⁹⁵ H. Quelch, Trade-Unionism, Co-operation, and Social Democracy. p. 7.

appeared appropriate.⁹⁶ Increasingly, political intervention was occurring in the industrial sphere. Furthermore, Hyndman's concentration upon political participation exhibited some of the tendencies which had characterised Owenism, in particular, the belief that capitalism would necessarily be replaced peacefully by a new social formation.⁹⁷ It was the crude economic determinism of the Federation, which was seen as the iron law of history leading the working class inexorably towards revolution, that constituted their 'marxism'.

With the economic destruction of capitalism a self-evident truth, at least according to the SDF, they could justifiably argue that the way forward lay in the political education of the working class; a role for which they saw themselves as admirably suited. Furthermore, owing to both the unemployed demonstrations in London which erupted in 1886 and climaxed with the events of 'Bloody Sunday' on November 13 1887,⁹⁸ and the increasingly interventionist role of the state demanded by these demonstrations,⁹⁹ the

⁹⁶ T. R. Threfall remarked in 1890 that the TUC had been forced to confront the issue of political action in 1886 when the Labour Electoral Association was formed - itself a result of the extension of the franchise in 1884. 'The New Departure in Trades Unionism'. *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXVIII. No. 164. October 1890. p. 520.

⁹⁷ There is, of course, a difference here between Hyndman and the Owenites in that the latter group proposed change by example from outside society and not through political representation. In this respect the anti-parliamentary stance of the Socialist League can also be said to have derived from Owenism. Hyndman's views also owe much to the Chartists who used industrial militancy for political purposes.

⁹⁸ Following a series of riots throughout 1887 Sir Charles Warren, the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, banned all meetings in Trafalgar Square. This action, which was seen by many as representing the curtailment of free speech, precipitated the demonstration on the 13th November. Various radical and socialist bodies met in the East End of London and proceeded to the Square only to find it completely surrounded by the police and the armed military. Fighting broke out and, as a result, three people died of the injuries they received and hundreds more required hospital treatment.

⁹⁹ In March 1886 Joseph Chamberlain, the leader of the radical wing of the Liberal Party, circulated a Minute to local authorities urging them to provide relief work for the unemployed. The importance of this Minute lies in the fact that for the first time state and local governments acknowledged their responsibility for unemployment. With this development there occurred a fundamental re-orientation of what was considered political.

SDF could quite justifiably claim that the revolution was at hand. 'The present system is rapidly breaking up. Capitalism is falling of its own inherent rottenness, and the future, dark to our enemies, is full of hope and encouragement to us. The storm cloud of industrial revolution is hanging overhead', they proclaimed.¹⁰⁰ But the major effect of these riots, as Gareth Stedman Jones has written, was not solely upon the socialist groups but also upon the governing parties.

The social crisis of London in the mid-1880s engendered a major re-orientation of middle-class attitudes towards the casual poor. In conjunction with growing anxiety about the decline of Britain's industrial supremacy, apprehension about the depopulation of the countryside and uncertainty about the future political role of the working class, fear of the casual residuum played a significant part in provoking the intellectual assault which began to be mounted against *laissez faire* both from the right and the left in the 1880s.¹⁰¹

These unemployed riots shook London between 1886 and 1887. Hyndman had already noted with confidence in 1885 that: 'For the first time...since the great Civil War of the Seventeenth century London leads England; and this means to those who have eyes to see that the Great social revolution of the nineteenth century has already begun.'¹⁰² Engels, however, was to describe these 'revolutionaries' as consisting of: 'masses of the poor devils of the East End who vegetate in the borderland between working class and lumpenproletariat': that, in fact, their real motivation was not revolution, but work.¹⁰³ More importantly, as Morris noted, the leading of the riots by

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Fifteenth Annual Conference of the Social Democratic Federation. Twentieth Century Press, London 1895. p. 5. SDF Leaflets and Pamphlets 1883-1931. Although these words were written a few years after the events of Bloody Sunday, they were sentiments which were expressed throughout by the SDF.

¹⁰¹ G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London. A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian England. (1971). Peregrine, Harmondsworth 1984. pp. 296-297.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 345.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

the SDF was: 'a stupid thing to do unless they really had strength and resolution to make a big row, which they know they have not got.'¹⁰⁴

Although the Social Democratic Federation played an important role in the riots, their attitude towards trade unionism meant that when the new unionism emerged barely six months later in 1888, the Federation was incapable of perceiving this as a significant force in the struggle for socialism. The leaders of the new unions, such as John Burns, were forced to break away from the main body of the Federation, thereby producing a significant rupture between the main group and the trade union activists.¹⁰⁵ Tom Mann's disillusionment with the Federation occurred over their differing responses to the unemployment and distress of 1886/1887. Instead of co-ordinating demonstrations, Mann called for the adoption of the universal eight-hour day which would, he believed, not only create greater employment opportunities but would also give workers the leisure time necessary to educate themselves in the principles of socialism.¹⁰⁶

A similar policy towards trade unionism was adopted by the Socialist League. William Morris believed that the: 'Trades Unions, founded for the advancement of the working class as a class, have already become conservative and obstructive bodies, wielded by the middle-class

¹⁰⁴Diary entry, February 12 1887, in Florence Boos, ed., 'William Morris's Socialist Diary'. History Workshop Journal, Issue 13, Spring 1982. p.30.

¹⁰⁵ As a result of this the 'new' trade unionists were drawn into a closer relationship with the leaders of the old unionism. In the case of John Burns, 1858-1943, this meant a turning away from the Federation to, firstly, the Fabian Society, where he was courted by the Webbs, and then to the Liberal Party. He began his political career with the Liberals in 1906 as President of the Local Government Board, a position which he held until 1914. He was then appointed President of the Board of Trade but resigned over the attitude of the party to the war.

¹⁰⁶ Tom Mann, What A Compulsory 8 Hour Working Day Means to the Workers. (1886). Reprints in Labour History No. 2. Pluto Press, London 1972. pp. 19-20.

politicians for party purposes.'¹⁰⁷ This was: 'the blind alley which the Trades Unions have now got into: I say again if they are determined to have masters to manage their affairs, they must expect in turn to pay for that luxury.'¹⁰⁸ The real business of the socialists was to: 'instil this aim of the workers becoming the masters of their own destinies, their own lives, and this can be effected when a sufficient number of them are convinced of the fact by the establishment of a vast labour organization.'¹⁰⁹

Where the two groups sharply disagreed and which caused the split in the SDF between Hyndman and Morris was over parliamentary participation. 'I believe that the Socialists will certainly send members to Parliament when they are strong enough to do so', wrote Morris in his diary. 'But I fear that many of them will be drawn into that error [of stopping short of socialism by advocating palliative measures] by the corrupting influence of a body professedly hostile to Socialism: and therefore I dread the parliamentary period (clearly a long way ahead at present) of the progress of the party.'¹¹⁰ It was for this very reason that Morris later believed that the alliance of elements which comprised the Independent Labour Party needed to be countered by an alliance of professedly socialist groups.

This movement, this force for the revolution that we all call for can only be fully evolved from this conscious opposition of the two powers, monopolist authority and free labour: everything that tends to mask that opposition, to confuse it, weakens the popular force, and gives a new lease of life to the reaction, which can indeed create nothing, can only hang on for a while by favour of such drags on such weakness of the popular force. If our own people are forming part of parliament,

¹⁰⁷ William Morris, 'Art Under Plutocracy', (1883). The Collected Works of William Morris 24 Volumes. Longmans, Green & Co., London 1910-1915. Vol. XXIII. p. p.188.

¹⁰⁸ William Morris, 'The Policy of Abstention', (1887). M. Morris, ed., William Morris. Artist Writer Socialist. Vol. 2. p. 443.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 444.

¹¹⁰ F. Boos, ed., 'William Morris's Socialist Diary'. p. 7.

the instruments of the enemy, they are helping to make the very laws we will not obey. Where is the enemy then? What are we to do to attack him?¹¹¹

The problem for the Socialist League lay in being clearly able to identify the enemy. How could the working-class oppose the Liberal Party when it appeared to be offering them the very reforms they sought?¹¹² The enemy was re-casting itself in a different mould and even appeared to be adopting some of the root principles of socialism, namely collectivism. The enemy was no longer without – a beast apart – but was nestling within.

If the Social Democratic Federation proclaimed the inevitability of revolution the same cannot be said for the Socialist League. The League, under the leadership of Morris, acknowledged that the pressures upon the state demanded new solutions to urgent problems but, they argued, unless socialists stood above and outside the system and maintained their criticism they would be unable to recognise the difference between palliative reforms and revolution, or, in the words of the Socialist League, between radicalism and socialism. The socialist problematic of independence and alliance coalesced around this point of principle within the Socialist League.

Those who think that they can deal with our present system in this piecemeal way very much underrate the strength of the tremendous organization under which we live, and which appoints to each of us his place, and if we do not chance to fit it, grinds us down till we do. Nothing but a tremendous force can deal with this force; it will not suffer itself to be dismembered, nor to lose anything which really is its essence without putting forth all of its forces in resistance; rather than lose anything which it considers of importance, it will pull the roof of the world down upon its head.¹¹³

¹¹¹ W. Morris, 'The Policy of Abstention'. pp. 445-446.

¹¹² Such as those outlined in the Newcastle Programme of 1891.

¹¹³ William Morris, 'Whigs, Democrats and Socialists', in Collected Works Vol. XXIII. p. 33.

The strength of the League's socialism lay in its emphasis upon the qualitative and conscious change it would bring to people's lives. This was not in opposition to Hyndman's advocacy of Marxist economics but, rather, was intended to both supplement and enrich it. At the time that Morris was formulating his socialism, the majority of active workers sought allegiance politically with the radical wing of the Liberal Party. It was in order to combat what he believed was a deep-seated radicalism amongst the working class that Morris urged the socialists to:

set about the great work of organising and educating discontent, teaching the root doctrines of Socialism to every one we can reach, enrolling in the Socialist body every one who genuinely accepts these doctrines; making our voices heard as Socialists on every opportunity, but holding ourselves aloof from every movement which has not the furtherance of Socialism as its direct aim.¹¹⁴

For 'radicalism will never develop into anything more than radicalism. It is made for and by the middle classes, and will always be under the control of rich capitalists: they will have no objection to its political development, if they think they can stop it there: but as to real social changes, they will not allow them'.¹¹⁵

The reason why Morris continually stressed the importance of spreading socialist knowledge amongst the working class before they could be victorious in the class struggle was because he, above all, was aware that the state was not a neutral force, in contradistinction to the Fabian's policy of permeation and the Social Democratic Federation's economic determinism. As early as 1885 Morris forecast what he saw as the inevitable outcome of the spread of imperialist competition among the European nations:

¹¹⁴W. Morris, 'Order And Anarchy', in Justice, No.4, Vol.1. February 9 1884. BLHE 1880-1900.

¹¹⁵Quoted in E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic To Revolutionary, pp266-267.

You cannot fail to have noted the frequency and persistency and bare-faced cynicism of these wars of exploitation of barbarous countries amongst all European nations these last few years; and next as far as we are concerned we are not contented with safe little wars against savage tribes with whom no one but ourselves wanted to meddle, but will even risk wars which may or indeed must in the long run embroil us with nations who have huge armies who no more lack the 'resources of civilisation' than ourselves.¹¹⁶

This was, for Morris, the other side of industrial capitalism, as detrimental to the international solidarity of the workers as it was to the workers at home. The competition between industry both in England and abroad was the 'mask that lies before the ruined cornfield and the burning cottage, the mangled bodies, the untimely death of worthy men, the desolated home'.¹¹⁷

It would be incorrect, however, to argue that Morris saw the consequences of the changing nature of state activity as pre-determined. From 1884 onwards when significant numbers of working-class men were enfranchised for the first time, and when the effects of the economic downturn and unemployment were beginning to bite deeply, the pressure for reform came from below as well as from the more radical members within the two political parties. The struggle for reform imposed from above as well as demanded from below was, essentially, a contest over meanings and definitions. For whilst collectivism from above could mean greater state control over the population in order to maximise industrial and imperial efficiency, collectivism from below concerned the demand for working-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 385.

¹¹⁷ W. Morris, 'Art Under Plutocracy'. p. 188.

class recognition in the name of social rights and well-being.¹¹⁸ The key agent in this struggle over meanings and definitions was identified by Morris as the working class, consciously informed by the theories of socialism. It was, above all, a struggle to be conducted against ideology itself both within the socialist and labour movements as well as within the wider community. John Carruthers, a member of the League argued:

We shall of course be told by the Labour party as we are by other nominal Socialists, who have more than a half belief that Socialism is not necessary since the present system can be so improved as to meet all reasonable requirements, that we are impracticable purists, so bigoted that we would rather do nothing for the workmen than take less than a complete system of Socialism. This is, however, a complete inversion of the facts. It is they who will do nothing that can be of any practical use, and who are delaying serious legislation by leading the workmen who have not given thought to the subject on the road of palliative measures which they would know if they were really Socialists will take them out of the only road that can lead to economic well-being.¹¹⁹

The practical result of Morris's acknowledgment of the bankruptcy of radicalism and the power of both capitalism and the state was his rejection of involvement in the trade union movement. But Morris's stress upon the propagandist role of the Socialist League left the League exposed over the issues of strategy and tactics. It was all very well to argue that a conversion to socialism had to precede any revolutionary change in the

¹¹⁸ See Stuart Hall & Bill Schwarz, 'State and Society, 1880-1930', in Mary Langan & Bill Schwarz, eds., Crises in the British State 1880-1930, Hutchinson, London 1985. pp. 20-21 & pp. 24-25. The authors argue that the case for collectivism from above was 'primarily organized around particular forms of knowledge: explicitly psychology and eugenics - the sciences of social engineering often summarized in the phrase "social Darwinism".' p. 20. They go on to argue that Gramsci proposed two possible outcomes to the transition from economic individualism to the planned economy. The first was a violent upheaval. The second was a passive revolution. 'By passive revolution Gramsci referred to historical occasions in which a "revolution" was installed from above, in order to forestall a threat from below but in which the popular masses did not take or win the political initiative.' p. 25.

¹¹⁹ John Carruthers, Socialism and Radicalism, Hammersmith Socialist Society, London 1894. pp. 10-11. BLHE 1880-1900.

social system but the social and economic context demanded that immediate solutions be found. Furthermore, it was this lack of a coherent strategy, as we have already seen, which had implications for the feminism of the Socialist League.

A crucial moment in the history of the League occurred in the first few months of 1887, in the mining areas of Lanarkshire and Northumberland when events conspired to bring the League into close contact with the trade union movement. The borderland areas of Britain were traditionally strong supporters of the Liberal Party, however, animosity towards the Liberals had spread throughout Scotland in the 1880s over the issue of land. The agitation was further fuelled by Henry George, the leading exponent of land nationalisation in the 1880s, who embarked upon a second lecture tour of Scotland in 1884.¹²⁰ That same year a branch of the Social Democratic Federation was formed in Glasgow and the Scottish Land and Labour League, linking both land and industrial nationalisation, was organised in Edinburgh. The link between the two bodies, as far as the Socialist League was concerned, was provided in the person of John Bruce Glasier. When the split in the SDF occurred in London in 1884 Glasier led the Land and Labour faction of the Glasgow branch into the Socialist League.¹²¹

Between 1884 and 1886 the coal trade in Scotland experienced a steady fall in money wages. An improvement in conditions during the winter of 1886 encouraged the various miners' unions to form the Scottish Miners' National Federation in order to try and recoup the wages they had lost. Several of the unions in the Federation, including the Ayrshire miners who were led by Keir Hardie, soon dropped out leaving the Lanarkshire miners to

¹²⁰ George's famous work on land nationalisation was Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry Into The Cause of Industrial Depression, And of Increase of Want With Increase of Wealth. The Remedy. William Reeves, London 1880.

¹²¹ The following information derives primarily from F. Reid, 'Keir Hardie's Conversion To Socialism', in A. Briggs & J. Saville, Essays in Labour History, Vol. 2. pp. 34-40

fight on their own. It was at this point that the Socialist League in Glasgow stepped in to support the miners.

In February 1887 the Glasgow branch of the League called a demonstration on the Green in support of the striking Lanarkshire miners and over twenty thousand people attended.¹²² The League's club room was given over to the miners to use as a strike headquarters. Shortly after, a similar demonstration was organised by the Edinburgh branch, again a large audience of over twelve thousand attended. The combination of the strike and the sheer size of the crowds who attended the demonstrations organised by the socialists led to a retaliatory show of force by the authorities and the coal owners. The police were drafted in to escort blacklegs and to supervise strikers' meetings. The resulting tension between the two sides developed into a night of rioting at Blantyre from the 7th to the 8th of February, which was ultimately quelled by troops brought in from Glasgow. The other miners in the Federation were again called out by the S.M.N.F. But this show of solidarity came too late as the miners were forced back to work in March.

Although the League in Scotland had fervently supported the miners in their strike, the headquarters of the League in London took a different view of the proceedings. That the miners were defeated by a combination of the coal owners and the authorities cannot be doubted but part of the blame for the defeat of the miners must also lie with the Socialist League, for they argued that sectional strikes were of little value in the progress towards a socialist society. Consequently, the only advice the League's strike pamphlet had to offer was:

If...you intend to make this a starting-point for a complete emancipation of the labourers from the thralldom of the capitalists, by bringing about the solidarity of the workers - employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled - if you intend to learn why we the

¹²² William Morris noted in his diary that the League had received an 'excited letter from the Glasgow branch'. F. Boos, ed., *William Morris's Socialist Diary*. p. 31.

wealth-producers are poor, and what is the remedy, - then we Socialists welcome you as comrades...But if you are looking for a small betterment of your own condition only - if you are content to attempt to fight this question with your sectional trades' union - then we feel that it is a duty that we owe to our class and to you to show you that it is a hopeless fight.¹²³

Thus at the very moment when the miners in Scotland were receptive to socialist ideas,¹²⁴ the League drew back from the conflict, unable to see that, with their assistance, it may have been possible for this 'sectional' strike to develop into a broader socialist action.

At the height of the strike a branch of the League had been formed at Hamilton with forty miners enrolling at the first meeting. When Morris visited the branch only some two months later, even though the branch was by then in a sad state, the Secretary and President of the Hamilton miners moved a resolution in favour of socialism which was carried unanimously. Despite this resolution, Morris described the meeting as: 'a depressing affair: we met in an inn parlour some members of the Branch which seems to be moribund, and they would scarcely say a word and seemed in last depths of depression: the hall, not a large one, was nothing like full; it was a matter of course that there was no dissent, but there was a rather chilly feeling over all.'¹²⁵ The Socialist League had told the miners it was a hopeless fight and so it proved to be. But the resolution passed at the Hamilton meeting indicated that, among some of the miners at least, a conversion to socialism had been effected.

The change of attitude on the part of the Socialist League, from one of independence towards alliance, in relation to the trade union movement

¹²³ Quoted in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary*, p.436.

¹²⁴ The strike, for example, marked the point of Keir Hardie's conversion from liberalism to socialism. See D. Howell. *op.cit.* p. 3.

¹²⁵ F. Boos, ed., 'William Morris's Socialist Diary'. pp. 48-49.

promised to augur much for the future of socialism in England. The question remains to be answered, then, as to why the Socialist League was unable to capitalise on its opportunities to spread the word of socialism within the trade union movement. Partly the reason lies with the internal faction fighting which was occurring within the Socialist League at this time. The divisions between those who favoured a policy of total abstention from all forms of collaboration and those who were in favour of parliamentary agitation were increasing.¹²⁶ This resolved itself into a fight primarily between the anarchists, led by Frank Kitz and David Nicoll, and the rest. So at the moment when the Socialist League was at last achieving some success, it was unable to do anything about it because of internal fighting. The socialists in Scotland, left bereft by the Socialist League, formed themselves into the Scottish Labour Party in 1888 and affiliated later to the ILP. Because of its policy over parliamentary action the League also lost the support of its branches in the north of England to both the Social Democratic Federation and then, later, to the Independent Labour Party.

A further opportunity for the League to make contact with trade unionists presented itself a month after the miners strike in Scotland. When J.L. Mahon, a former member of the Socialist League Council, visited Newcastle in early March 1887, the Northumberland miners' strike was already in progress.¹²⁷ Mahon quickly came to the conclusion that the major struggles

¹²⁶ In 1888 this dispute over tactics resulted in the split from the Socialist League of its Bloomsbury branch, whose members included Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling. The branch formed itself into the Independent Bloomsbury Socialist Society.

¹²⁷ John Lincoln Mahon, 1865-1933, was an engineer by trade. He became an organiser for the miners which annoyed Morris, as did also his switch from anti-parliamentarianism to parliamentarianism. By 1888 he had left the Socialist League and was involved in the newly-established Scottish Labour Party. His politics veered increasingly to the right over the years and he was later expelled from the Leeds branch of the ILP. See F. Boos, 'William Morris's Socialist Diary', pp. 67-68. J.L. Mahon had also been a founder member of the Land and Labour League in Edinburgh which was affiliated to the SDF.

were being fought here in the North, beside which the internecine battles between the various socialist groups in London paled into insignificance. Accordingly he formed the North of England Socialist Federation which was composed of members from all the socialist groups but was affiliated to none. Morris, on his way back from Scotland, was invited, along with Hyndman and others, to speak at the miners' county demonstration on April 11th 1887. Again, as in Scotland, because of his belief in the futility of piecemeal reforms, Morris urged the miners to support a general strike for improvements for all rather than a sectional strike for their own benefit. 'Not a little more wages here and leave to work six days instead of four', but a total victory, was Morris's advice.¹²⁸

What is of importance about both these episodes is that at the very moment when the workers were affiliating in large numbers to the socialist cause, the Socialist League was incapable of taking the initiative because of its internal struggles over the issue of parliamentary action. Of further significance was that for the first time it was becoming clear that the future for socialism lay not in London but in the North of England. The implications of the League's failure in early 1887 was that the initiative fell to those small, local groups which eventually became federated under the Independent Labour Party. Thus the failure of the Socialist League was to leave the field clear for the dominance within the new party of those who did not perceive a consciousness of socialist principles as of paramount importance. By October 1893 Morris's views on trade union militancy had been so changed that he could write:

Those who are really doing a service to the world by their action are the workmen, because they are striving for the freedom of labour, which must be the road whereby the new order of things, so much

¹²⁸Quoted in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary*, p. 444.

desired by all who can use their eyes and their reasoning powers, will be obtained.¹²⁹

However, by this time the ground had already been lost for in January of that year the Independent Labour Party had been founded in Bradford. With the formation of this new political party the majority of the provincial societies immediately sought affiliation thereby diminishing whatever support the Socialist League had in the North of England.

The same riots and strikes which had briefly involved the Federation and the League also had a profound effect upon some of the members of these bodies who were already active in the trade union movement. Whatever the London leaders of the socialist groups had to say on the subject of trade unionism was belied by the actions of some of their own members such as Enid Stacy, Eleanor Marx, Will Thorne, Tom Mann and Ben Tillett who saw in those developments the emergence of mass working-class protest which needed to be captured for the socialist cause. It was this development which came to be known as the 'new unionism'. According to John Burns:

The difference between them,[the old and the new unionism], if any, is entirely due to the fact that the "new" see that labour-saving machinery is reducing the previously skilled to the level of unskilled labour, and they must in their own interests, be less exclusive than hitherto. The "new" believe that distinctions of labour must disappear and that class prejudices that have disintegrated the labour movement must be abolished...The men who call themselves the "old" unionists to-day are those who have departed from the genuine unionism of forty or fifty years ago that never hesitated to invoke State interference and in so doing did more for the workers than it could secure by trade union effort.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ William Morris, 'The Coal Struggle. Some Obvious Thoughts Thereon' (1893). M. Morris, William Morris, Artist, Writer Socialist Vol. 2. p. 520.

¹³⁰ A Speech by John Burns on the Liverpool Congress. 1890. Reprinted in Eric Hobsbawm, ed., Labour's Turning Point 1880-1900 (1948). Harvester Press, Brighton 1974. pp. 73-74.

It has become customary to date the rise of the 'new unionism' from 1888 when Annie Besant, a former radical converted to socialism by the London riots of the previous year, organised the women match workers at the Bryant and May factory. According to Sarah Boston, for example, this was: 'The match that lit the explosion of "new Unionism"'.¹³¹ Certainly, within the space of a year general labour unions such as the National Amalgamated Labour Union and the Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union had been formed.¹³² Between 1888 and 1892, which are seen as representing the peak years for the growth of new unionism, trade union membership doubled, reaching about one and a half million.¹³³ However, as John Lovell has said, there had been new unions prior to this date and he cites the formation in 1886 of the Association of Ironworkers and the Card and Blowing Room Operatives Union.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, whatever the continuities with earlier unionism, some contemporaries certainly felt that they were witnessing a new departure. Engels wrote that:

the masses are on the move and there is no holding them any more. The longer the stream is dammed up the more powerfully will it break through when the moment comes. And these unskilled are very different fellows from the fossilised brothers of the old Trade Unions; not a trace of the old formalist spirit, of the craft exclusiveness of the engineers, for example; on the contrary, a general call for the organisation of *all* Trade Unions in *one* fraternity and for a direct struggle against capital.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Sarah Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement Davis-Poynter, London 1980. p. 47.

¹³² See A. E. P. Duffy, 'New Unionism in Britain, 1889-1890: A Reappraisal'. The Economic History Review, Vol. XIV. No. 2. 1961. p. 307.

¹³³ Figures cited in J. Hinton, Labour and Socialism, p. 45.

¹³⁴ John Lovell, British Trade Unions 1875-1933, Macmillan, London 1977. pp. 15-16 & 22.

¹³⁵ Engels to H. Schluter. Letter dated January 11, 1890. Marx and Engels on Britain, pp. 523-524.

Debate has arisen over the impact of socialism upon the new unionism. Clegg, Fox and Thompson are among those who seek to minimise the role of socialism arguing that the general labour union arose almost by accident.¹³⁶ Opposing this view has been Eric Hobsbawm, who has argued that to deny the impact of socialism is to suggest that trade unionism was totally devoid of ideology and was merely operating within the parameters dictated by the various industrial contexts in which the new unionism found itself.¹³⁷ David Howell's work on the relationship between independent labour politics and trade unionism - both new and old - suggests a more complicated picture in which some unions were directly influenced by socialists, others remained much more attached to both the Liberals and the Conservatives.¹³⁸ He does not suggest, however, that this was merely due to contingency; a variety of factors, such as 'the diversity of industrial and political traditions, diversity of union structures, diversity of economic challenges' all affected the impact of socialism. Moreover, he argues, the long-term impact of socialism did produce gradual shifts towards political independence, which were finally realised in the years just before the First World War, from even the most hostile unions such as the miners¹³⁹

What distinguished the new unionism from the old, apart from their socialist leadership, were several key elements. Firstly, these new unions were general labour unions. That is, unlike the older-style craft unions they were not organised around one particular skill or trade but, rather, included unskilled workers who were engaged in a number of quite diverse occupations in a number of different geographical locations. Thus the Gas

¹³⁶ H. A. Clegg, A. Fox & A. F. Thompson, A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889. Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1964, pp. 91-92.

¹³⁷ See Eric Hobsbawm, 'Trade Union History'. Economic History Review. Vol. XX, No. 2 1967. pp. 358-364 Especially p. 360..

¹³⁸ Howell. op. cit. Especially Part 1.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 123.

Workers' and General Labourers' Union took in, among others, rubber workers, dyers in the woollen industry, local authority workers, metal trades' workers, chemical workers, and workers in clay-pits and quarries.¹⁴⁰ Their branches were to spread from the original London location to the Northern provincial towns, the Midlands and, particularly, Yorkshire. The Union was, as we have already seen, also active in Bristol where Enid Stacy had helped to form a branch in that city in 1889.

Secondly, what was particularly of note about these unions was the involvement of women both at the organisational level and in their general membership. From the start women were admitted as members on an equal footing with the men. The new unionism thus appeared to mark a high point in the relationship between female and male workers. In Bristol, for example, the strike of the women confectionary workers at the Sanders' factory in 1892 was supported by the dock workers.¹⁴¹

But what particularly distinguished these new unions from the old craft unions was not solely their appeal to women and unskilled and semi-skilled workers. They were characterised also by their rejection of the policy of mediation between individual unions and bosses and their espousal instead of the use of the strike as a weapon for both industrial and political purposes. 'What, then, is the method by which the workers of this country are likely to work out their social salvation?' asked Tom Mann in 1890:

In the first place, combinations of workmen and workwomen formed for the express purpose of taking defensive and aggressive action are absolutely requisite, and have been seen to be requisite for a long time by many of the skilled workers of this country. But the great mass of workers have failed to make use of this their only powerful weapon, and the skilled men who in years gone by combined amongst themselves

¹⁴⁰ J. Hinton, Labour and Socialism, p. 49.

¹⁴¹ See Samson Brhyer, An Account of the Labour and Socialist Movement in Bristol, Bristol Labour Weekly, Bristol 1929. Part 2. p. 36.

have failed to reap a tithe of the advantage that might result from combination, owing to the mass of unskilled and handy men who stood outside the pale of their organisation...[T]he working masses will no longer tamely submit to their lot, but are even now taking the most practical of all steps to bring about very great changes.¹⁴²

Despite their rapid growth, the new unions exhibited certain weaknesses from the start which arose primarily from the scattered location of their branches and the diverse nature of the trades they represented. The problems were not simply in terms of administration, although keeping track of so many members in so many different places proved difficult in itself. They were also extremely vulnerable financially as their funds were quickly depleted during strikes. This, in its turn, made the new unionism particularly vulnerable to counter-attacks by federations of employers formed to break strikes and implement lock-outs. It was this vulnerability which introduced a change in the new unionism and it came to resemble the old unionism in some aspects

Although it was a strike of women match workers which initiated the explosive growth of trade unionism between 1888 and 1892, in reality they succeeded in unionising only a small number of women in comparison with male unskilled workers. By 1901, for example, women comprised around thirty per cent of the labour force yet they constituted only seven and a half per cent of trade unionists.¹⁴³ Certainly among some unionists, as a result of the socialists' agitation, a new attitude was adopted towards women workers. The support exhibited by the dock workers towards the confectionary workers in Bristol is an illustration of how the prominence accorded to women in the local socialist society could, in turn, effect a

¹⁴² Tom Mann, 'The Development of the Labour Movement'. The Nineteenth Century, No. 159, May 1890. p. 712.

¹⁴³ Figures cited in J. Hinton, Labour and Socialism, p. 31.

change of consciousness and a new solidarity between women and men workers.

Will Thorne, however, who worked alongside Eleanor Marx in establishing the Gas Workers' Union and who had received his knowledge of socialism from her, decided that: 'women do not make good Trade Unionists and for this reason we believe that our energies are better used toward the organisation of male members.'¹⁴⁴ Even Ben Tillett, who strongly urged the unionisation of women and whose socialism was informed by Morris's hope for the future, could at times become ambiguous on the question of the woman worker.

The question of Trade Unions for women is a question having an important bearing on the lives of our womenfolk. The unemployed problem is hardly more important, for with the institution of machinery there are greater possibilities opening out to the employer to let the woman supplant the man as a toiler. Every facility thus granted is a danger to the family life, and is a menace to the standard of comfort of the wage-earner...The woman burdened with her sex duties already is ill-prepared to add to them the more serious task of the breadwinner.¹⁴⁵

Tillett's comments reveal the continuity of thought which existed between the old and the new unionism. Where men such as Broadhurst had called for the prohibition by the state of women's labour in those industries where they competed directly with men, Tillett advocated trade union organisation. Both, however, shared a fundamental belief in the sexual division of labour and saw the substitution of women for men as a danger to family life. So that whilst the new union leaders regarded the unionisation of women as important and attempted to include women in their

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Teresa Olcott, 'Dead Centre: The Women's Trade Union Movement In London 1874-1914'. London Journal, Vol.2, No.1, May 1976. p.43.

¹⁴⁵ Ben Tillett, 'Trades Unions For Women'. Women's Trade Union Review. No. 23. October 1896. pp. 7-10. WTUL Papers.

organisations as members of the working class, this class action was developed on the basis of a deep-seated belief in different gender roles, within a labour force structure which was itself increasingly divided by gender. The attitude of the new trade unionists showed how the socialist problematic of alliance was continually intersected by adherence to gendered ideology. The new hope of mass socialist organisation among the working class, the building up of alliances across trades, was thereby constrained by the perpetuation of a consciousness which was at best ambivalent to the needs of women workers and, at worst, actively hostile.

Women and unskilled workers were perceived as being particularly difficult to organise, but that, by itself, cannot explain the new unionists' attitudes.¹⁴⁶ One explanation was the need for the new unions to establish their respectability in the face of growing middle-class hostility to their militancy and a counter-attack by the employers, which saw in the years between 1890 and 1895 a number of employer federations established with the aim of breaking long strikes.¹⁴⁷ In addition to this, a number of commentators have remarked that as the new unionist leaders got older they tended also to become more conservative in their attitudes.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the new unions did represent the industrial expression of mass working-class activity which also sought political representation. And, ultimately, the one socialist group which could accommodate these demands was the Independent Labour Party which, in the words of Keir

¹⁴⁶ The question of women's unionism is the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁴⁷ Among the employer federations established were the Shipping Federation and the Employers Federation of Engineering Associations.

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, 'General Labour Unions in Britain, 1889-1914', Economic History Review, Vol. 1, Nos. 2 & 3, 1949, p. 135; H. Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism pp. 119-120; D. Howell, op. cit. p.122.

Hardie, adopted a 'catholic position' which corresponded to the feelings of the public.¹⁴⁹

The relationship between the trade unions, the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League and the Independent Labour Party reveals that the issues of independence and alliance need to be perceived on a number of different levels. At its simplest, independence entailed political independence from, pre-eminently, the Liberal Party, whilst alliance can be understood as both a desire for socialist unity and an industrial alliance with the trade union movement. Balancing these aspirations involved both constraints and opportunities. It is no longer sufficient to speak of a dominant labour aristocracy perverting the natural destiny of the working class, for the very good reason that this group provided not only the leadership of the new unions but was also prominent in local associations of socialists. If anything, some workers within this stratum of the working class were inclined to be more progressive than other strata because their involvement in co-operative societies, friendly societies and trade unionism encouraged a strong sense of class identity.

It has been shown that the archetypal 'labour aristocrat', Henry Broadhurst, expressed views which were increasingly anachronistic by the late 1880s. In this context the actions of the TUC in 1895 against socialist representation need to be seen more as the last gasp of a dying order rather than as representative of trade union opinion. This action notwithstanding, trade union opinion was changing during these years as the formation of the Labour Electoral Association in 1886 indicated. This did not, however, mean that the union movement was necessarily moving towards socialism – to argue otherwise would be to underestimate the hostility of the TUC towards socialists – but it did mean that the ILP and the TUC could find common

¹⁴⁹ Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party, 1898, p. 7. BLHE 1880-1900.

ground on the issue of independent political representation, which eventually resulted in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. This may help to explain the shift in focus noted in articles written by leaders of the ILP. To them, the Liberal Party appeared very much a spent force in politics. After the Unionist split in 1886 the Liberals ruled for only three of the twenty years to 1906. In this context, it seemed that an alliance with radicals could take place without political compromise. These, then, were the opportunities that presented themselves to the ILP.

The constraints upon the ILP are no less important. As we have seen, the ILP was formed from a number of local socialist societies whose opinions differed considerably on important matters. The attitude of both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, at a national level at least, to trade unionism and political representation made any moves towards alliance fraught with difficulties. In addition, the ILP had to cope with the legacy of the past. Its lack of success with the two biggest groups of workers - the miners and the cotton workers - showed the persistence of traditional methods of organisation and voting into the twentieth century. Moreover, the fact of early industrialisation, however uneven, along with the mid-Victorian years of compromise and slow consolidation meant that revolution was not a plausible option within the labour movement. Hardie and MacDonald demonstrated this in their article where they conceived of the state as a neutral body rather than as something which needed to be overthrown.

What cannot be denied is that the failure of socialist fusion and the formation of the Labour Representation Committee led to an emphasis upon working within the parliamentary system and a closing off of theoretical alternatives. What finally remains to be explored is the effect these moves concerning independence and alliance had upon women and those who sought

to 'make socialists'. By 1893, William Morris had changed his mind with regard to political and industrial militancy. In that same year Morris and Bax argued in their book, Socialism. Its Growth and Outcome, for the necessity for a direct relationship between socialist theorists and political activists:

While it is essential that the ideal of the new society should be always kept before the eyes of the mass of the working-classes, lest the continuity of the demands of the people should be broken, or lest they should be misdirected; so it is no less essential that the theorists should steadily take part in all action that tends towards Socialism, lest their wholesome and truthful theories should be left adrift on the barren shore of Utopianism.¹⁵⁰

The problem was that none of the leaders of the ILP were socialist theorists in the sense that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky in Germany or Lenin and Trotsky in Russia were. Neither were most of those outside the party, such as Hyndman and Blatchford. Carpenter and Morris were arguably the two most important theorists on the British scene but Carpenter's links with the leadership of the ILP diminished during the 1890s and Morris died in 1896.¹⁵¹ Thus the relationship between theory and practice, which was never strong in the English context, was weakened as the parliamentary road to socialism became the creed of the ILP and the later LRC.

This adherence to the parliamentary system was strengthened by the role of the Fabians who, as professionals, assumed the mantle of the theorists of the socialist movement following the death of Morris. During the 1890s the Fabians increasingly stressed their commitment to state socialism. For some, this was a quite remarkable turn around. In 1889, for example,

¹⁵⁰ W. Morris & E. B. Bax, Socialism. Its Growth and Outcome (1893). Charles Kerr & Co., Chicago 1912. p. 210.

¹⁵¹ For Carpenter's socialist involvement see Sheila Rowbotham, 'Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life', in Sheila Rowbotham & Jeffrey Weeks, Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. Pluto Press, London 1977. pp. 102-104.

George Bernard Shaw wrote a pamphlet called Anarchism versus State Socialism in which he took to task the Social Democratic Federation for wishing to impose state socialism upon the country.¹⁵² By 1891, however, Shaw's position was completely reversed. In a paper called 'The Impossibilities of Anarchism' Shaw constructed a quite bizarre argument saying:

the Social-Democrat is compelled, by contact with the hard facts, to turn his back decisively on useless denunciation of the State. It is easy to say, Abolish the State; but the State will sell you up, lock you up, blow you up, knock you down, bludgeon, shoot, stab, hang - in short, abolish you, if you lift a hand against it. Fortunately, there is, as we have seen a fine impartiality about the policeman and the soldier, who are the cutting edge of the State power. They take their wages and obey their orders without asking questions...Now these orders come ultimately from the State - meaning, in this country, the House of Commons. A House of Commons consisting of 660 gentlemen and 10 workmen will order the soldier to take money from the people for the landlords. A House of Commons consisting of 660 workmen and 10 gentlemen will probably, unless the 660 are fools, order the soldier to take money from the landlords for the the people.¹⁵³

By 1896 permeation was an acknowledged policy within the Fabian Society. In an address to a socialist and trade union congress on Fabian policy they declared: 'The Fabian Society is perfectly constitutional in its attitude: and its methods are those usual in political life in England...It sympathizes with the ordinary citizen's desire for gradual, peaceful changes, as against revolution, conflict with the army and police, and martyrdom...The Socialism advocated by the Fabian Society is State Socialism exclusively.'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² George Bernard Shaw, Anarchism versus State Socialism, Henry Seymour, London 1889. SLTB Part 1. 1889/5.

¹⁵³ George Bernard Shaw, 'The Impossibilities of Anarchism', in Fabian Tracts Nos 1-150, Fabian Society, London 1908. Tract No. 45. pp. 26-27.

¹⁵⁴ 'Report on Fabian Policy and Resolutions', in Fabian Tracts Nos. 1-150, Tract No. 70. pp. 4-5.

As a result of these developments what was to survive in some cases was the rhetoric of utopianism, expressed in terms of comradeship and fellowship, without the necessity of crossing the 'river of fire', the acknowledgment of the class struggle. John Bruce Glasier, speaking against the proposal of fusion with the SDF at the 1898 annual conference of the ILP, revealed the extent to which utopian aspirations had replaced the necessity for a theoretical understanding of socialism when he said:

Socialism is a very great and a very marvellously pervading and encompassing power. It is the most human spirit that has grown up in the world, and it is the divinest of all things we have ever had vision of with our eyes. We who call ourselves Socialists cannot ourselves comprehend its might or magnitude. We are as reeds shaken in the wind of its coming...Our programme was always as Socialist as it is now, and if we have altered in any way it is because - from the very circumstances of our success laying upon us the charge of directly acting in legislative and administrative affairs - our speaking has become less insurrectionary, less extreme - more opportunist, if you will - than formerly...If I may say so, the ways of the S.D.F. are more doctrinaire, more Calvinistic, more aggressively sectarian than the I.L.P. The S.D.F. has failed to touch the hearts of the people. Its strange disregard of the religious, moral, and aesthetic sentiments of the people is an overwhelming defect.¹⁵⁵

The unity between theory and practice, which Morris had stressed as essential to the attainment of socialism in England, was, as Glasier's speech indicates, reduced to a vague woolliness with socialists reduced to the status of 'reeds shaken in the wind'.

An alternative approach was that of Ramsay MacDonald, a Fabian himself, who believed that socialism was an organic process, a gradual, rational development towards greater equality. As a part of this philosophy, MacDonald also rejected the whole concept of the class war:

¹⁵⁵ Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party, 1898, pp. 25-27. BLHE 1880-1900.

The future of the Labour Party is to be determined by its success in making its principles clear to itself and to the country. If it narrows itself to a class movement or a trade movement, or a manual workers' movement...It will weaken and finally disappear...Those conclusions are reached, not by a process of economic reasoning or of working class experience. They rest on conceptions of right and wrong common to all classes.¹⁵⁶

The weakening of the links between theory and practice did not necessarily mean that the language of making socialists disappeared within the ILP as a whole. Hannah Mitchell, a member of the ILP, wrote of its attraction in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire in 1901:

The Labour Church attracted a type of Socialist who was not satisfied with the stark materialism of the Marxist school, desiring warmth and colour in human lives: not just bread, but bread and roses, too. Perhaps we were not quite as sound on economics as our Marxian friends took care to remind us but we realised the injustice and ugliness of the present system. We had enough imagination to visualise the greater possibility for beauty and culture in a more justly ordered state. If our conception of Socialism owed more to Morris than to Marx, we were none the less sincere, and many found their belief strengthened by the help and inspiration of the weekly meetings held in these northern towns.¹⁵⁷

Nevertheless, she 'soon realized that Socialists were not necessarily feminists in spite of the item in their programme affirming their belief in "the complete social and economic equality of women with men"'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in T. Rothstein, From Chartism To Labourism, p. 290. Rothstein, 1871-1953, arrived in England in 1891. He was active in the SDF during his years in England, particularly against the imperialist faction within the SDF led by Hyndman. See John Saville, introduction to From Chartism To Labourism, pp. v-xvii. As a member of the SDF Rothstein would have been opposed to the views expressed by MacDonald. Nevertheless, the above quotation does reflect what MacDonald wrote elsewhere. See particularly his work, The Socialist Movement. Williams & Norgate, London n.d. pp. 147-150.

¹⁵⁷ Hannah Mitchell, The Hard Way Up. Virago, London 1977. p. 116.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 99.

Enid Stacy had recognised the problem as early as 1894, when she urged the conference of the ILP to set up separate women's associations. During this period she consistently exposed the hostility of many socialists to feminist aspirations through her articles which appeared in both The Labour Prophet and the Clarion.¹⁵⁹ The thrust of her argument was that women and men should work together within the socialist movement to overcome the disadvantages women suffered as a result of their inferior education and socialisation. But the reality for many working-class women like Hannah Mitchell was very different, especially when it came to experiencing marriage:

I soon realized that married life, as men understand it, calls for a degree of self-abnegation which was impossible for me. I needed solitude, time for study, and the opportunity for a wider life. Probably I should have hesitated, even then, but for the newer ideas which were being propounded by the Socialists. Men and women were talking of marriage as a comradeship, rather than a state where the woman was subservient to, and dependent upon, the man.¹⁶⁰

She continued bitterly: 'they believed in "freedom's cause" but thought that liberty is a kind of thing that "don't agree with wives".'¹⁶¹

In 1903, Christabel Pankhurst was to take the LRC and the ILP to task for their attitudes towards the women's movement:

As a rule, Socialists are silent on the question of the position of women. If not actually antagonistic to the movement for women's rights, they hold aloof from it...Working-men are as unjust to women as are those from other classes. So far from making any effort to enfranchise them at the congress last September, the trade-unionists actually defeated the proposal to place women on a political equality with men...The LRC is financially supported by women trade-unionists; unless the committee agitates for political rights for them, these

¹⁵⁹ The articles covered such topics as 'Woman's Suffrage', 'Working Women', 'The Labour Movement and The Home' and 'What Women Can Do In The Socialist Movement'.

¹⁶⁰ H. Mitchell, op. cit. pp. 88-89.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 96.

women do not gain by their adhesion to it...It would seem that most socialists quite fail to recognise the mischievous and far-reaching effects of sex-inequality. Is the ILP attitude due to the fact that its adherents are conservative where women are concerned and unfavourable to their emancipation, or do they fear by making a firm stand on the question to offend the prejudices of the British working man?¹⁶²

The socialist problematic of alliance and independence, which dominated the movement from the 1890s onwards, was constrained by the quite different elements which comprised that movement. In pragmatic terms it resolved itself into an antagonism between political and industrial activists and socialist theorists; between the trade union movement, the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party. Alliance was vital for the future of socialism in England given the impetus towards collectivism which was developing within the two governing parties following the breakdown of *laissez-faire* traditions. But the different historical inheritances of the various groups in combination with considerable internal dissension failed to produce agreement on unity across the spectrum. The result was the dominance of the ILP - a party led by men who became less committed to changing the consciousness of the working class during the 1890s than to obtaining parliamentary representation, even to the extent of a possible alliance with radicals. For the feminists involved in the socialist movement this lack of attention to consciousness was critical as it exposed the gap between theory and practice which had become greater following the death of Morris. The following three chapters look at how socialist women, through the trade union movement, the struggle for the vote and the formation of independent political groups, sought their own liberation.

¹⁶² Christabel Pankhurst, 'Women and the Independent Labour Party'. ILP News. Vol. 7, No. 7 August 1903. BLHE 1880-1900.

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONISM TO 1914

Looking back on over twenty years of trade union organisation for women Beatrice Webb wrote in 1896:

Many of the most respected leaders of women's movements are strong opponents of factory legislation. It is easy to see why this has come about. For a whole generation the pioneers of women's advancement have been fighting to remove old restrictions on women's individual liberty. The distinguished ladies who have led the movement for women's right to property, women's access to higher education, women's freedom to enter the learned professions, are instinctively hostile to the very idea of regulation. These ladies fought and won their own battles on high abstract theories of individual rights and political justice. And thus it comes about that the opposition to factory legislation appeals scarcely at all to past experience or practical results, but is based entirely on abstract theory. Some persons entertain a strong aversion to any State interference with adult labour whether male or female.¹

The note of condescension evident in both the title - *How Women Obstruct Women's Advancement* - and content of Webb's article suggested that trade union organisation for women had, by the 1890s, reached a higher stage of development. According to Webb, those women opposed to state intervention did so in the spirit of individualism which was in contrast to the collectivism which state protection would foster among women trade unionists, citing the Lancashire cotton workers as an example.² Such views

¹ Beatrice Webb, 'How Women Obstruct Women's Advancement'. The Commonwealth. Vol. 1. No. 2. February 1896. p. 53. BLHE 1880-1900.

² 'If we wish to see the capacity for organisation, the self-reliance, and the personal independence of the Lancashire cotton-weaver spread to other trades, we must give the women workers in those trades the same legal fixing of hours, the same effective prohibition of overtime, the same legal security against accident and disease, the same legal standard of sanitation and health as is now enjoyed by the women in the Lancashire cotton mills.' *Ibid.* p. 56.

were subsequently reiterated by Webb and her husband in their classic text The History of Trade Unionism.³

Protection, as Webb said, was the key word and the dominant issue throughout the early history of women's trade unionism. Under its rubric arguments for and against the rights of women to enter into paid employment were mobilised. Superficially the debate over protection centred around the question of state intervention through legislation. But what Webb saw as the result of an adherence to an 'abstract theory' was, in reality, part of a much larger debate concerning competing definitions of womanhood itself. Was woman the helpless creature as claimed by male trade unionists and the state in their combined endeavours to limit the scope of her employment or was she capable of taking control of her life alongside Henry Broadhurst's 'great and strong men of the world',⁴ as Emma Paterson, the founder of the Women's Protective and Provident League in 1874, asserted?⁵

It will be argued that the question of protection legislation is central to understanding the debates which were critical to feminism and socialism. Subsumed within the protection debates were notions of difference and equality which in their own turn led to questions concerning independence or alliance with regard to trade union organisation. But the issue of protection goes deeper than either definitions of womanhood or questions of

³ Beatrice & Sidney Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (1894). Longmans, Green & Co., London 1911. pp. 295-297. For a similar interpretation see also B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry (1915). E. P. Publishing, Wakefield 1978. pp. 119-122. Like the Webbs, Hutchins was a member of the Fabian Society.

⁴ Women's Union Journal Vol. II. No. 21. October 1877. p. 72. WTUL Papers.

⁵ Emma Paterson, 1848-1886, came from a middle-class background (her father was a headmaster of a school) but was forced to support herself following the death of her father when she was sixteen. The only biography of her is Harold Goldman, Emma Paterson. She Led Women Into A Man's World Lawrence & Wishart, London 1974. As the sub-title of this book suggests, it is not a feminist work.

organisation. It is intimately concerned with the two basic structures of modern society - gender and class. In the eyes of Beatrice Webb the issue was relatively straightforward; those who opposed protective legislation were middle-class feminists; those who supported it were the workers, the socialists and the labour movement generally. This was the dominant view down to the 1970s, expressed as an irreconcilable division between bourgeois feminists on the one hand and Marxists on the other.⁶ Since that time, as we shall see, the issue has become far more complex and integral to debates not only between socialists and feminists but also within those two broad categories, and relate to questions of class formation and strategies for liberation. However, the persistence of Webb's views in the historiography of trade unionism down to the 1970s indicates that she was at least partially correct. Like many historiographical debates, the question is not necessarily one of overturning previous interpretations but of reaching a greater understanding of the complexities involved.

In this chapter, I propose neither to present a general outline history of women and trade unionism nor to consider the experiences of women workers in a particular union; both these stories have already been told.⁷ I shall begin with a brief examination of women's work since industrialisation because it is important to understand that the debates over protective legislation took place in the context of a labour market which was not gender neutral. Women and men rarely performed the same jobs and women always received less pay than men working in the same

⁶ See, for example, Hal Draper & Anne G. Lipow, 'Marxist Women Versus Bourgeois Feminism', in R. Miliband & J. Saville, eds., The Socialist Register 1976, Merlin Press, London 1976. pp. 179-226. Especially pp. 185-186. See also the work of the socialist Marion Ramelson, The Petticoat Rebellion. A Century of Struggle For Women's Rights, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1967. pp. 101-104.

⁷ See for example, Sarah Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement, Davis-Poynter, London 1980. Sheila Lewenhak, Women and Trade Unions, Ernest Benn, London 1977. Norbert Solden, Women in British Trade Unions 1874-1976, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin 1978. The histories of women in individual trade unions are too numerous to mention. One example is James Ramsay MacDonald, ed., Women In The Printing Trades, P.S. King & Son, London 1904.

industry. I shall then examine the various contemporary debates which have arisen concerning protective legislation. None of those involved in the debates deny that skilled male workers in particular, because of their trade union strength, adopted exclusionary practices towards women workers and sought legislative intervention to confirm this exclusion. Debate occurs, however, over why this happened. Finally, through an examination of the development of the Women's Protective and Provident League from its formation in 1874 to the position of the Women's Trade Union League⁸ in 1914 I shall show that attitudes towards protective legislation were not fixed. Not only did attitudes change over time, they were also mediated by a number of factors including an adherence to feminism and/or socialism. Although in this chapter I shall be mainly concerned with women in their own organisations, separate from the mainstream unions, this does not mean that women did not work both within and alongside the male-dominated trade unions. However, valuable as this work undoubtedly was, it was within the separate women's organisations that the debate over protection was expressed most clearly.

Particular attention is paid to the reasons why a policy of opposition to state protection for women-only emerged in the early years of the Women's Protective and Provident League. It has been necessary, therefore, to devote considerable attention to the reasons which motivated the formation of the League in 1874. The personalities of the leaders of the League were critical in the formulation of policies. As such, therefore, this chapter proceeds to examine the policy changes which occurred with the emergence of each successive leader following the death of Emma Paterson in 1886. These leaders were Lady Dilke, her niece Gertrude Tuckwell and Mary Macarthur. From 1906 onwards the League operated in tandem with the National

⁸ In 1889 the League changed its name to the Women's Trade Union Provident League and two years later became the Women's Trade Union League, a name which it retained until the dissolution of the League in 1921 when it became the women's section of the Trades Union Congress.

Federation of Women Workers. The key figures in both organisations were Gertrude Tuckwell and Mary Macarthur. Both women were thereby placed in a position to exert considerable influence over the direction of women's trade unionism. Because personality played such a crucial role this chapter also examines the political affiliations of the various leaders and their feminist perspectives, looking specifically at how the two informed each other.⁹

In early feminist literature of the 1960s and 1970s much analysis centred around the separation of the home from the workplace with the development of industrialisation. The home became a site of reproduction and consumption whilst the workplace became the site of production. In this development of separate spheres and an accompanying sexual division of labour the roots of modern day women's oppression were to be found.¹⁰ Implicitly, rather than explicitly, the pre-industrial era was seen as a golden age for women in terms of production. But just as historians of industrialisation have stressed its uneven and gradual development so, too, have historians of women's work stressed that the transition to industrial capitalism had a rather more complex effect on women's role in production. As Maxine Berg has argued:

The idea of a transition in the eighteenth century from a community based workforce where women may have played a prominent role to the more individualist, market-orientated, and, by association, more male labour force needs to be unravelled, and tested against the complex

⁹ For an essay which eschews the hagiographical approach to the leaders of women's unionism and examines how they often worked within the framework of an ideology which saw women as weak and helpless, in contradistinction to the women they were actually trying to organise, see Deborah Thom, 'The Bundle of Sticks: Women, Trade Unionists and Collective Organization before 1918', in Angela V. John, ed., Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986, pp. 261-289.

¹⁰ See, for example, the early arguments presented in Juliet Mitchell, Woman's Estate, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1971. Later feminists were to argue that although patriarchy existed long before the advent of capitalism, it nevertheless assumed a specific form under that mode of production. See the arguments presented in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and The Case For Socialist Feminist, Monthly Review Press, New York 1979.

character of the contact between market and custom, individual and community which developed in the early industrial period. Clear-cut divisions are difficult to identify, and were they to emerge, may well have been caused by rather than eliminated by the processes of industrialisation.¹¹

Berg's own research found the introduction of mechanisation had varying effects on women's employment. The use of the jenny in the woollen industry devastated employment in agricultural areas but was declared a 'veritable "women's technology"' in textile centres.¹² In the trade of nailmaking in the West Midlands, on the other hand, women were degraded workers as early as the first half of the eighteenth century.¹³ In both the textile and metal industries a gendered division of labour was apparent long before industrialisation.

Nancy Osterud's study of the Leicester hosiery industry confirms Berg's observations regarding the uneven and gradual transition of production from the home to the factory. It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that this process was completed. Similarly, Osterud found that a gender division of labour existed prior to mechanisation primarily because of women's extra responsibilities for child care and domestic work. This division of labour did not, however, necessarily mean that women occupied a subordinate position within the family work unit. Technological changes in themselves did not bring about a socialised version of this familial division of labour. It was when they were allied to a capitalist concentration of production that this occurred. Thus, the introduction of the wide frame knitting machine, with its increased productivity, encouraged the

¹¹ Maxine Berg, 'Women's Work, Mechanisation and The Early Phases of Industrialisation in England', in Patrick Joyce, ed., The Historical Meanings of Work. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987. pp. 64-98. Especially p. 96. See also Maxine Berg, The Age of Manufactures. Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain 1700-1820. Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1985. Especially Chapter 6.

¹² Berg, 'Women's Work'. op. cit. pp. 78-79.

¹³ Ibid. p. 86.

concentration of male knitters in workshops whilst the women continued to seam the stockings at home. As a result workers were paid as individuals rather than as members of a family unit.

Osterud argues that women's domestic responsibilities had always ensured that their level of production was lower than that of men but when this was linked to the payment of an individual wage it had a two-fold effect. Firstly, it ensured that women's wages were lower and their employment considered subordinate to that of men. Secondly, it meant that women's domestic work was unwaged and thereby separated from the meaning of production. Home and work did not become separate for women but the individual wage payment discriminated between 'productive' and 'non-productive' work. After 1870, with the development of seaming machinery women were drawn into the factory. The combined effect of earlier spatial differentiation of men's and women's work and the lower payment for seaming was to reproduce this lower payment within the factory system. When labour substitution occurred at the end of the century and women finally took over knitting they were not paid at the same rate as the men had been.¹⁴

Osterud's study shows that the development of a gendered division of labour and differential wage rates was determined neither by the imperatives of capitalist industrialisation nor by inherent male prejudice but arose instead out of a complex interaction between familial custom and capitalism. Similarly Sally Alexander also wrote in her pioneering study of London: 'the sexual division of labour on the labour market originated with, and paralleled that within the family.'¹⁵ Thus in London, where small-scale

¹⁴ Nancy Grey Osterud, 'Gender Divisions and the Organization of Work in the Leicester Hosiery Industry', in A. V. John, ed., Unequal Opportunities, pp. 45-68.

¹⁵ Sally Alexander, 'Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century London; A Study of the Years 1820-1850' in Juliet Mitchell & Ann Oakley, eds., The Rights and Wrongs of Women, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1976. p. 73.

production predominated throughout the century, women's work was confined to four main areas: 'firstly, all aspects of domestic and household labour - washing, cooking, charring, sewing, mending, laundry work, mangling, ironing etc; secondly, child-care and training; thirdly, the distribution and retail of food and other articles of regular consumption; and, finally, specific skills in manufacture based upon the sexual division of labour established when production (both for sale and domestic use) had been organized within the household.'¹⁶ Much of this work went unrecorded in the census either because of the bias of those recording the information, its identification with domestic work or its seasonal nature.

From the work of these historians we can see how this continued association between work and the home for women meshes with the paternalism identified as a key factor in mid-Victorian stabilisation. Paternalism represented a negotiated compromise between skilled male workers and capitalists. The structure of women's work, particularly its continuities with the pre-industrial period, needs to be seen as part of this compromise. Women workers, seemingly the most 'independent' or autonomous of workers when working in their own homes or in small workshops, were, in fact, the most degraded and dependent.¹⁷ Their control over the labour process was minimal and their secondary status within the labour market confirmed this subordination.

Since the 1970s there has been a sustained debate concerning protective legislation and women's secondary status within the labour market. It arose primarily out of the extraordinarily abstruse domestic labour debate in which a variety of mainly Marxist commentators tried to determine whether

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Richard Price, *Labour in British Society*, Croom Helm, London 1986. pp. 73-78. Price's work does not mention women here, indeed his work has very little to say about women at all. It follows, though, from Price's analysis that women formed the bulk of this seemingly autonomous but degraded stratum of workers.

and in what way the family, and women's labour within it, was functional for capitalism.¹⁸ In an attempt to break out of this theoretical quagmire, Heidi Hartmann and Jane Humphries looked at the question from the historical perspective of relationships within the working-class family rather than that of capital.

In her article, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation By Sex' Hartmann argued that patriarchal relations¹⁹ within the family pre-dated the rise of capitalism. Within the family unit of production men gained authority and status through their role as head of the production unit whilst women were subordinate because of their childcare and domestic duties. Industrialisation, by removing production from the home, displaced these relations into the social sphere. Women's subordination was thereby increased in two ways; by transferring male authority to the public sphere and by job segregation of the labour market. That patriarchy rather than capitalism was primarily responsible for this is evidenced by the fact that instead of organising low-paid women workers, men sought to exclude them from their trades.²⁰

By contrast, Jane Humphries has argued that the working-class family represented a site of struggle against capitalism which promoted communal ties and was a necessary pre-condition for the development of class

¹⁸ The number of articles generated by this debate are too numerous to mention here. Those who wish to follow the debate would be well advised to read Clare Burton, Subordination, Feminism and Social Theory, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1985. Chapter Four, 'Domestic Labour and the Political Economy of Women', pp. 57-85. In addition, Ellen Malos' work The Politics of Housework, Allison & Busby, London 1980 not only provides a number of the pertinent articles but is accompanied by an excellent introduction to the subject.

¹⁹ By patriarchal relations Hartmann means a hierarchical ordering of society based primarily upon gender. It is the mechanism by which all men oppress women regardless of their status.

²⁰ Heidi Hartmann, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex', in Martha Blaxall & Barbara Reagan, eds., Women and the Workplace. The Implications of Occupational Segregation, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1976. pp. 137-169.

consciousness. In addition, the family, through the struggle for a family wage, also represented an attempt by the working class to control the labour supply and thus improve their standard of living. Although the use of 'sexist ideology' was apparent within the working class in relation to protective legislation, Humphries argues that not only was control over the labour supply practicable through exclusionary tactics towards married women, it was also an endeavour which accorded with the bourgeois ideology of women. Women gained indirectly through this control as a result of increased family wages.²¹

For Hartmann then, gender, or patriarchal relations as she calls it, was the motivation behind protective legislation for women workers. For Humphries, on the other hand, protective legislation was a class issue fought by men on behalf of all members of the working class. Clearly there are problems with both these accounts, not the least of which is the search for the one all-embracing source of oppression. Apart from being unduly deterministic, such a search is ultimately fruitless unless it is linked to highly specific historical situations. One of the main problems with Hartmann's thesis is her equation of job segregation and industrialisation with a sharp transition from home to workshop or factory production. As Berg and Osterud's work demonstrates there was no such readily identifiable break. Furthermore Hartmann has unproblematically read off social and ideological relations from economic relations. Men may well have been the heads of the family unit of production and the most productive

²¹ Jane Humphries, 'Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working-Class Family', Cambridge Journal of Economics Vol. 1, No. 3 1977. pp. 241-258. See also her two further articles: 'The Working Class Family, Women's Liberation and Class Struggle: The Case of Nineteenth Century British History', Journal of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 9, No. 3 1977 pp. 25-41; and 'Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State, and Working Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act', Feminist Review, Issue 7, Spring 1981. pp. 1-33. For a specific critique of this latter article see Angela V. John, Letter, Feminist Review, Issue 9, Autumn 1981. pp. 106-109. For a critique of Humphries' use of the concept of a 'family wage' see Michele Barrett & Mary McIntosh, 'The "Family Wage": Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists', Capital and Class 11, Summer 1980. pp. 51-72.

members in terms of actual output but it simply is not possible to argue that this necessarily resulted in men perceiving women's labour as secondary and inferior. With regard to Humphries' thesis two particular problems present themselves. To argue that men sought female exclusion as a defence of the living standards of the working-class family is to assume firstly that the interests of women and men within the family were coterminous and, secondly, that all women were in a position to receive male economic support. The second problem is Humphries' use of the concept of the family wage. As Barrett and McIntosh have pointed out, the family wage is as much myth as reality and, moreover, ignores the existence of male workers without dependents and women workers who are sole breadwinners.²²

Since these debates a number of writers on protective legislation have tended to eschew this teleological approach arguing instead that it arose out of a complex interaction between gender and class issues.²³ According to Sonya Rose several factors were involved. One factor was that women were perceived as cheaper and less skilled workers before industrialisation. This custom, bolstered by bourgeois gendered ideology, both perpetuated low wages for women and ensured that gender antagonism would play a central role in the struggle between capitalists and workers over wages and control over the labour process. In addition, changing concepts of masculinity, which revolved around the possession of a skill and independence, also had an impact upon the way women workers, particularly married women workers, were perceived to undermine male status.²⁴ The result was a

²² See Barrett & McIntosh. *op. cit.*

²³ See, for example, Sonya O. Rose, 'Gender Antagonism and Class Conflict: Exclusionary Strategies of Male Trade Unionists in Nineteenth-Century Britain'. *Social History*, Vol. 13, No. 2 May 1988. pp. 191-208, especially. p. 195.

²⁴ *Ibid.* See also Sonya O. Rose, "Gender at Work": Sex, Class and Industrial Capitalism'. *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 21, Spring 1986. pp. 113-131.

working class fractured along gender lines and also divided hierarchically by status.

Other writers, whilst not disagreeing with this analysis, have stressed particular factors as critical in the development of gender antagonism. Wally Seccombe, for example, has emphasised changes in the wage form and 'the subsistence norm'. Utilising a concept of patriarchy, but limiting it to 'systems of male headship in family households', Seccombe argues that a significant shift occurred around the middle of the nineteenth century. Within the working class, it was the strata of skilled workers who had retained the greatest control over the labour process, and who could also afford to keep their wives at home, who were in the vanguard of the movement to exclude women. The individual wage payment threatened to destroy their patriarchal control within the family whilst at the same time the intensification of the labour process threatened to destroy their status as skilled workers. Thus they simultaneously called for the exclusion of women and the payment of a living wage. Their collective strength, through the trade union movement, gave them the power to resist proletarianisation. In so doing: 'The drive of craft unions to exclude women from membership, and enforce their secondary status in industry under the banner of a living wage, was thus *doubly* divisive. It split the interests of working women from men, and it separated the unorganized labouring poor from the organized and higher paid ranks of the skilled trades.'²⁵

Similarly, Jane Mark-Lawson and Anne Witz have written: 'it would be possible to argue that patriarchal domination within the household is potentially lessened by the entry of women into direct labour under capitalist subordination, because women gain direct access to a wage. It is at this point that a shift will take place in patriarchal relations and male

²⁵ Wally Seccombe, 'Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Breadwinner Norm in Nineteenth-Century Britain'. *Social History*. Vol. 11, No. 1 January 1986. pp. 53-76. Especially p. 68.

workers may turn to *exclusionary* strategies and the pursuit of a family wage in order to protect wage levels from cheaper female labour.²⁶ What is apparent from all of these accounts is that whilst concentration and intensification of production and the payment of an individual wage are integral to capitalism, the pursuit of exclusionary tactics by some male workers is not. Nevertheless, missing from all these accounts are the reactions of women themselves. Were they the passive victims of this combined capitalist/patriarchal onslaught? Did they perceive their interests as separate from those of the men or did they, too, support the struggle for a family wage? It is by looking at women's trade unionism that some of the answers to these questions can be supplied.

In April 1874 Emma Paterson, a bookbinder by trade and one-time secretary to the Working Men's Club and Institute Union²⁷ and the Women's Suffrage Association,²⁸ published an article in the Labour News on 'The Position of Working Women and How to Improve It'. She was impelled to write the article following newspaper reports on the death of a working woman.

Not long ago a case appeared in the London papers which must have horrified all who read it. A woman had been working in a white-lead factory near London; the factory was three or four miles from her lodging; she had to walk to and fro morning and night. She could not pay the smallest amount for riding, nor provide herself with proper food, for her wages were but 9s. per week for work occupying twelve hours

²⁶ Jane Mark-Lawson & Anne Witz, 'From "Family Labour" to "Family Wage"? The Case of Women's Labour in Nineteenth-Century Coalmining', Social History, Vol. 13, No. 2 May 1988. pp. 151-174.

²⁷ The Working Men's Club and Institute Union was founded in 1862 by the Rev. Solly for the purpose of educating working men. See G. D. H. Cole & Raymond Postgate, The Common People 1746-1946. (1938 & 1946). Methuen, London 1964. p. 379..

²⁸ See Barbara Drake, Women in Trade Unions. (1920). Virago, London 1984. p. 10. I have been unable to find any further references to this body. It probably refers either to the London National Society for Women's Suffrage which was formed in 1867 or to one of the suffrage societies organised by it.

each day. She bravely battled with her difficulties for some time, and managed to keep alive herself and three children, but, at last, nature could hold out no longer; she died, and her death, leaving the children unprotected, brought to light the fearful tale.²⁹

This case was, as Paterson pointed out, by no means uncommon. Her own experiences as a working woman had taught her how difficult it was for women to survive on their wages alone. Accordingly she believed that the solution for women was to form themselves into trade unions and fight collectively for higher wages as male workers had done. The object of such unions, she continued, was three-fold. Firstly, women needed to protect themselves against under-payment from employers. Secondly, they needed to protect themselves against male trade unionists, some of whom had passed rules forbidding their members to work with women.³⁰ Finally, they needed to protect themselves against the combined efforts of male unionists, through the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, and the government, who together were proposing to limit the hours of women's work under the Factories and Workshops Bill.³¹ As she wrote: 'This Bill is intended to apply also to children, with whom working women are classed, thus conveying and endeavouring to perpetuate, the idea that women are entirely unable to protect themselves, a position, to a certain extent, degraded and injurious.'³²

The attitudes of these three groups - the employers, the male unionists and the state - towards women workers, as Paterson recognised, revolved

²⁹ Emma Paterson, 'The Position of Working Women and How to Improve It'. (1874). Reprinted in First Annual Report of the Women's Protective and Provident League. July 1875. p. 20. History of Women.

³⁰ This was an explicit reference to her own trade where the London Consolidated Bookbinders' Society refused to enrol women as members.

³¹ This Bill became law in 1878.

³² E. Paterson, 'The Position of Working Women and How to Improve It'. p. 21. .

around a common definition of womanhood. Women were weak and helpless and so the more readily exploited by employers, the more likely to displace male workers in the workplace with their cheaper labour and thus the more needy of state protective legislation. It was to counter this belief in the helplessness of women, by proving that through their own efforts they could, like the men, regulate their own wages and hours, that Paterson advocated the formation of women-only trade unions.

Paterson's original proposal, as outlined in the Labour News article, was for the formation of a National Protective and Benefit Union of Working Women along similar lines to the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, which was chosen as a model because it organised workers with a variety of skills who were dispersed throughout the country.³³ Thus Paterson envisaged the union would initially be composed of women pursuing a number of different trades who might, in time, be able to go on to form their own trade-based unions. The formation of a general union had, however, a further purpose, for Paterson believed that by this method of organisation the better-paid women workers would be able to subsidise the lower-paid workers and thereby place the latter group in a stronger position than they would be if they were organised into separate smaller unions.³⁴ These were extremely radical ideas for the early 1870s., not simply because they concerned women workers at a time when the dominant form of union organisation was the craft-based male union but also because they predated the formation of general labour unions - the 'new unionism' - by some fourteen years.³⁵ As it turned out, they were too radical.

³³ Ibid. pp. 21 & 23.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 23. The groups of workers whom Paterson believed would eventually be strong enough to form their own unions were the tailoresses, those engaged in earthenware manufacture, in straw plait manufacture and bookbinders.

³⁵ The rise of the new unionism is commonly dated from 1888, the year of the Bryant and May women matchworkers strike.

By July 1874 the response to Paterson's article was such that a conference of 'sympathetic ladies and gentlemen' was called in London³⁶ which resulted in the formation of the Women's Protective and Provident League, whose members included such people as Arnold Toynbee, the Rev. Stewart Headlam, Harriet Martineau, Anna Swanwick and Helen Taylor,³⁷ as well as Members of Parliament and representatives of the aristocracy. The composition of the Council of the League was, as this list suggests, almost entirely middle-class, although it was also supported by two trade unionists, Henry King and George Shipton.³⁸ They were predominantly women and men who had already been involved in feminist and philanthropic organisations. Unfortunately the dependence of the League upon the financial support of middle and upper-class subscribers meant that when it was formed the more radical ideas had to be abandoned. Hence the original title, the National Protective and Benefit Union of Working Women, was dropped for fear that the word 'union' would alienate middle class sympathisers. 'The word "union" had an evil sound in the ears of those to whom it seemed obviously associated with acts of wicked violence and

³⁶ See B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions p. 11.

³⁷ Arnold Toynbee was an economic historian who died in 1883 aged 31. After his death Toynbee Hall was established in Whitechapel in the East End of London from where Oxford students engaged in social work among the poor. The Rev. Stuart Headlam, 1847-1924, was, like Edward Carpenter, influenced by the views of the Christian Socialist Frederick Maurice whilst at Cambridge. In 1877 he agreed to give evidence for Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant at their birth control trial. He was the founder of the Guild of St. Matthew and was for many years a member of the Fabian Society. Harriet Martineau, 1802-1876, was a Unitarian, an essayist and a journalist whose major work concerned political economy. Anna Swanwick, 1813-1899, was also a Unitarian who assisted in the foundation of Girton College, Cambridge. Helen Taylor, 1831-1907, was the daughter of Harriet Taylor Mill and the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill. She was a member of the Kensington Society which was formed in 1865 for the purpose of obtaining both higher education and the vote for women. She later became one of the founder members of the Social Democratic Federation.

³⁸ Henry King was secretary of the London Consolidated Bookbinders' Society. His appointment in 1871 marked a change in attitude on behalf of the union towards women working in the trade, hence his support for the League. See Felicity Hunt, 'Opportunities Lost and Gained: Mechanization and Women's Work in the London Bookbinding and Printing Trades', in A. V. John, ed., Unequal Opportunities, p. 83. George Shipton was secretary of the London Trades Council.

intimidation', Emilia Dilke³⁹ wrote later when recalling the early days of the League.⁴⁰ The subsequent adoption of the word 'provident' was clearly intended to both appeal to, and reflect, the philanthropic instincts of middle-class liberals.

Lost, too, in the few short months between the publication of her article and the actual formation of the League was Paterson's plan of forming a general union of women workers of all skills. The League emerged instead as a central agency for the purpose of co-ordinating and encouraging trade unionism among women and not as an actual trade union itself. As a result of this dependence upon middle-class support the aims of the League were thereby considerably modified to reflect the nature of that support. In the first Annual Report of the League it was stated that:

the League may be able to render valuable services in giving advice or arranging for arbitration, should cases of dispute arise between employers and members of the societies, or among the members themselves. No tendency has yet been shown towards any rash or mistaken action on the part of the members, but if this should, at any time, be perceived, the intervention of an independent body composed of persons who are neither employers nor employed, might do much in moderating it.⁴¹

At the same time as deprecating strike action, the League declared it did not wish to interfere with 'the natural course of trade' and hastened to 'disclaim any views of antagonism towards the employers of female labour

³⁹ Emilia Dilke, 1840-1904, was an art historian and critic. She was a member of the Oxford branch of the Women's Suffrage Union. It was through her suffrage activities that she met Emma Paterson and was persuaded by her to join the League in 1876. She became secretary of the League in 1889. Although she did not marry Sir Charles Dilke until 1885 I have chosen to refer to her throughout the text as Emilia Dilke as the use of her previous name, Pattison, may cause confusion with Emma Paterson. See her entry in Joyce M Bellamy & John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. Vol. 3. Macmillan, London 1976. pp. 63-67.

⁴⁰ Emilia F. Dilke, 'Benefit Societies and Trade Unions for Women'. (1889). Reprinted in Carol Bauer & Lawrence Ritt, *Free and Ennobled. Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism*. Pergamon Press, Oxford 1979. p. 164.

⁴¹ *First Annual Report of the Women's Protective and Provident League*. p. 8.

as a class'. The object of the League, it was stated, was 'to promote an *entente cordiale* between the labourer, the employer and the consumer'.⁴² In terms of philosophy and organisation, then, the women's unions promoted by the League came to resemble closely the craft unions from which they had been excluded. Indeed, one of the first unions established by the League was the Society of Women Employed in Bookbinding of which Paterson herself became the first honorary secretary.⁴³ Paterson's original idea was not entirely lost, though, for in Bristol in September 1874 an address by her was to lead to the formation of the National Union of Working Women.⁴⁴

From the outset, the League had two immediate aims: to achieve recognition as a trade union by the Trades Union Congress and to prevent the enactment of the Factories and Workshop Bill. It was successful in its first aim in 1875 when Emma Paterson, representing the Bookbinders, and Edith Simcox,⁴⁵ representing the Shirt and Collar Makers, were admitted as delegates to the Glasgow Congress. The struggle against legislative

⁴² Ibid. p. 15.

⁴³ The other unions formed within the first year of the League's existence included the Society of Dressmakers, Milliners and Mantlemakers, the Society of Women Employed in Binding, Sewing and Trimming Men's Hats, the Society of Upholstresses and the Society of Shirt and Collar Makers. It is noteworthy that those unions which represented fields where women only were employed failed within a few years whereas the Bookbinders survived for almost forty years and the Upholstresses lasted for twenty years because they were supported in their venture by the complementary male union. A further reason for their longevity may also have been because they were run by women, Eleanor Whyte and Elizabeth Mears respectively, who actually worked in the trade.

⁴⁴ This organisation, which survived for about twenty years, was not the same as the National Union of Working Women which was formed by Louise Creighton in 1895. It is also not to be confused with the National Federation of Women Workers which Mary Macarthur established in 1906.

⁴⁵ Edith Simcox, 1844-1901, was a writer by profession and a close friend of the novelist George Eliot. For further information see Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men. Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present. The Women's Press, London 1985. p. 163. See also Rosemary Auchmuty, 'Spinsters and Trade Unions in Victorian Britain' in Ann Curthoys, Susan Eade & Peter Spearritt, eds., Women at Work. Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra 1975. pp. 119-120.

protection for women workers provided both the impetus for the formation of the League and justification for women-only unions.

There can be no doubt that it is desirable, in many cases, to shorten the hours during which women work, but if this is done by legislative enactments instead of by the combined action of the workers themselves, the result may merely be the reduction of wages, already often insufficient, and sometimes complete exclusion from work, thus becoming, in place of protection, a real and grievous oppression. When there is combined action among the workers, as in the case of men, it has been clearly seen, of late years, that no such legislation is necessary.⁴⁶

As an explanation for the establishment of women-only unions Paterson continued:

It is true that working men, who are joining in these well-meant but mistaken endeavours to improve the position of working women, might offer the same kind of protection which they themselves adopt. They might invite women to join their trade unions, or to assist them to form similar societies. But they do not seem inclined to do this. At three successive annual congresses of leaders and delegates of trades unions, the need of women's unions has been brought before them, and each time someone present has asserted that women *cannot* form unions. The only ground for this assertion appears to be that women *have not* yet formed unions.⁴⁷

Neither Emma Paterson nor the League were, in fact, opposed to protective legislation as such. What they were opposed to was the imposition of legislation by and on behalf of men which had been framed without women's consent or co-operation. Moreover, as Helen Taylor remarked in 1877:

I hope every one here present will read the annual report of this society and among the facts brought to your notice in it you will see what is the tender care of the Legislature for women's weakness - you will see that our legislators provide that women shall not work more

⁴⁶ E. Paterson, 'The Position of Working Women and How to Improve It'. p. 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

than 12 or 14 hours a day - while working men by their Trades Unions have secured to themselves nine hours of labour only. This is an example of how much better it is to help ourselves than to trust to protection.⁴⁸

What the League was arguing, therefore, was not that women did not require protection but rather that they would achieve greater gains if, like the men, they were strong enough to negotiate their own conditions of employment. This policy was not as middle class as Beatrice Webb later suggested for, as Sarah Boston has argued: 'experience has shown that trade union organisation has gained better protection for women workers than statutory protection.'⁴⁹

It was important, as Ray Strachey later wrote, to distinguish between these two discrete forms of protection:

the one which protected the women was imposed on them without their consent; it was entirely inflexible, and infringements of it were punishable in the courts, so that not even the most special circumstances could warrant its relaxation. The other, which was the result of men's own combination, was a much more adaptable affair. The male workers in different trades could, and did, adjust their demands to the necessities of the different trades, and owing to the fact that the agreements were voluntary, and were not enforceable at law, they could be freely modified on either side.⁵⁰

Whilst opposing protective legislation Paterson argued at the same time for the appointment of women as factory inspectors. This was seen by male unionists as a contradictory position for Paterson to take. They pointed out 'that the women had opposed restrictions on the employment of females' but

⁴⁸ Women's Union Journal, Vol. II. No. 18. July 1877. pp. 42-43. WTUL Papers..

⁴⁹ S. Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Ray Strachey, The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928). Virago, London 1978. p. 233. It is important to remember here that Strachey was a long-standing member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and was a close friend of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, whose biography she wrote, and who was always opposed to protective legislation.

saw themselves as 'broad enough to recognise that an increase of factory inspectors should carry the appointment also of lady inspectors'.⁵¹ However, this demand was perfectly consistent with Paterson's ideas concerning the equality of women. Given that factory legislation had been passed restricting women's hours of employment the claim for women to be represented among the inspectors was a question of accepting the inevitable whilst continuing to pursue the right of women to equal employment with men. Paterson's claim was supported by the men at the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress of 1879, although it was to be another fourteen years before the first woman factory inspector was appointed.⁵²

The debate over protective legislation was not primarily a class issue, as Beatrice Webb had suggested, rather it illustrated the degree to which all facets of social existence, including both the 'public' and 'private' spheres, were gendered.⁵³ Nonetheless, accusations of class bias continued to haunt the League throughout most of the 1870s and 1880s. Adolphe Smith, a member of the Committee of the League, stated in 1886 that: 'he feared the League was in bad repute among working men, who spoke of it as a goody-goody society and declined to help its work because of the air of patronage which the names and subscriptions of rich people gave it.'⁵⁴

The major difficulty with the League's opposition to protective legislation was that its spokespeople *were* middle class. Angela John's work on the pit-brow women's campaign of the mid-1880s shows that middle-class women sympathisers had little or no knowledge of their work

⁵¹ W. J. Davis, The British Trades Union Congress. History and Recollections Co-operative Printing Society, London 1910. pp. 77-78. BLHE 1880-1900.

⁵² This was May Abraham, later Tennant, who was appointed in 1893. See S. Lewenhak, Women and Trade Unions, p. 75.

⁵³ See, for example, Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850 Hutchinson, London 1987. pp. 29-33.

⁵⁴ Women's Union Journal, Vol. XI. No. 126. July 1886. p. 70. WTUL Papers.

or lives and tended to present a romanticised image of the rosy-cheeked out-door worker.⁵⁵ However, there were significant differences among members of the League over the implications of protective legislation which were as much to do with politics as with class. In 1887 Clementina Black, for example, speaking against a resolution at the TUC that women be prohibited from working in the chain and nail industries, argued that men only desired to ban women when they worked at the same trade as men.⁵⁶ The use of moral arguments – 'they were required to work in almost a nude state, and mixed up with men', according to Mr. Juggins, a delegate from South Staffordshire⁵⁷ – served to obscure this fact. The real issue, she argued, was women's low pay and she challenged the right of men to ban women's work in some trades where they competed with men for work without having considered this problem for all women workers. Yet other supporters of the League, such as the Countess of Aberdeen, could unrealistically argue: 'Working women must learn to have a spirit of independence, to take a pride in work, and to refuse, not for their own sakes only but for the sake of the community at large, to take such remuneration as would not support them in decent comfort.'⁵⁸

When working-class women did speak on the question, which was all too rarely, the reality of their working lives made the issue far more complex. Mrs. Mason became the secretary of the Leicester Society of Seamers and Stitchers, a union formed with the assistance of the League, in 1875. She was the first working-class woman to attend the Trades Union Congress as

⁵⁵ Angela V. John, By The Sweat Of Their Brow. Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines. (1980). Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1984. pp. 148-159.

⁵⁶ Women's Union Journal. Vol. XII. No. 141. October 1887. pp. 76-77. WTUL Papers.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 76. One year later, however, Juggins seconded Clementina Black's resolution on equal pay saying that in his industry they now realised that better pay and trade union organisation was preferable to prohibition. Women's Union Journal. Vol. XIII. No. 152. September 1888. p. 66. WTUL Papers.

⁵⁸ Women's Union Journal. Vol. XIII. No. 150. July 1888. p. 50. WTUL Papers.

a delegate in 1877, where she argued that: 'a great deal of their work was done at home by married women...If there were laws passed to make idle husbands maintain their families...married women could give over working either at their own houses or elsewhere. She was placed in a position of being compelled to earn a few shillings because her husband was not able himself to maintain the whole of the family.'⁵⁹ Mrs Mason was also the first woman to serve on a local trades council. Unfortunately she died in 1880 and the union suffered accordingly, deciding two years later to amalgamate with the men.⁶⁰

Ann Ellis became secretary of the Dewsbury Woollen Weavers following an eight week strike against wage cuts.⁶¹ She was ultimately dismissed by her employer for 'a too fiery speech' at an Industrial Remuneration Conference held in London in January 1885 and was forced to seek domestic work in Brighton.⁶² Speaking at the sixth annual meeting of the League she gave the members a detailed history of her union, explaining that whilst it was a mixed union women comprised the majority and were the most active members. Although women and men earned the same basic wage, she said, the introduction of protective legislation gave the men:

one advantage over us; that is that they can work overtime and receive 8d. per hour for work paid at 6d. per hour during the day. The women are forbidden to work overtime in the mills. I do not think women should be restricted in this way. The law cannot really protect them from overwork, because many of them who are married women, are obliged

⁵⁹ Women's Union Journal Vol. II. No. 21. October 1877. p. 73. WTUL Papers..

⁶⁰ B. Drake, Women In Trade Unions p. 14.

⁶¹ For further information see Joanna Bornat, 'Lost Leaders: Women, Trade Unionism and the Case of the General Union of Textile Workers, 1875-1914', in A. V. John, ed., Unequal Opportunities, pp. 212-214.

⁶² Eleventh Annual Report of the Women's Protective and Provident League, July 1885. p. 11. History of Women 250. See also B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions p. 14.

to do their work in the evenings and they therefore work much longer hours than the men do.⁶³

Here, in these statements by working-class women, it is possible to see that those who were opposed to protective legislation did so neither because of a deeply-held belief in *laissez-faire* philosophy nor from a point of feminist principle but because it was clearly unworkable given the material reality of their lives. It could not begin to counter the sexual division of labour within the home from which the secondary status of women's work outside the home developed. Married women's labour and that of those struggling to maintain their families without male assistance was conducted inside as well as outside the home because of the constraints placed upon their time by their familial duties. It was, therefore, conducted beyond the purview of legislative restrictions. In addition, paid work was not a freely exercised choice, as the Countess of Aberdeen seemed to think, but a necessity if the family were to survive. The reality for these working married women was not of two separate discrete spheres, the workplace and the home. Rather, work for them was a continuous process which transcended this ideological divide. Under these circumstances their criticism of protective legislation as worthless was formulated on the basis that the prevailing definition of work was relevant to the needs of male workers only. Whilst the work women did in their own homes remained unacknowledged and essentially invisible gender-specific state legislation for the public sector of employment could not remedy the double workload for the working woman.

During the 1880s strenuous attempts were made by Henry Broadhurst, acting on behalf of the TUC Parliamentary Committee, to obtain an amendment to the Factories and Workshops Act of 1878 prohibiting the work of girls under the age of fourteen in the nail and chain industries. At a

⁶³ Women's Union Journal, Vol. V. No. 54. July 1880. pp. 70-71. WTUL Papers.

meeting held at Lye, near Cradley in the Midlands, in May 1883 Miss Augusta Brown of the League argued that the real intention of the amendment was to abolish women's labour altogether: 'In a handbill she had seen, the men said parents might sacrifice the little the girls earned to confer an advantage on the male population. That was how they liked the women - to get a benefit for themselves.'⁶⁴ The vote on the resolution taken at the end of the meeting split along gender lines. None of the women voted for the amendment, whilst a majority of the men were in favour of it.⁶⁵ Even so, a woman present denied that the men wished to banish women's labour altogether and Joseph Hill, secretary of the Oldswinford nailers, stated that they merely wanted to 'confine females to proper classes of work'.⁶⁶ A further debate on this issue held at the Trades Union Congress in 1884 showed that questions of class were inextricably bound up with those of gender. In response to Broadhurst's charge that the women present were speaking against the proposed restriction purely as a matter of principle, Emma Paterson replied that: 'she had visited Cradley Heath and had seen girls employed at the class of work referred to, in sheds at the backs of the dwelling houses. She found them singing hymns, and looking strong and healthy. She saw nothing objectionable'. To which Mr. McKay of Edinburgh retorted: 'that although Mrs. Paterson had found the children singing, if she had gone a little further she might have found them saying prayers to their Maker to be delivered from such a state of bondage.'⁶⁷

The great irony of these debates was that both sides were in fundamental agreement regarding the objects of trade unionism, the necessity for arbitration rather than strike action, and the belief that strong bargaining

⁶⁴ Women's Union Journal, Vol. VIII, No. 88, May 1883. p. 35. WTUL Papers.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 35.

⁶⁷ Women's Union Journal, Vol. IX, No. 105 October 1884. p. 90. WTUL Papers.

was more appropriate than governmental interference with the course of free trade. The male craft unionists' approach to industrial legislation was based upon a belief in both individualism and an equal partnership between capital and labour just as the League's position on protection and their deprecation of strikes was similarly informed. By attempting to banish the notion that women were weak and helpless, the League swung to the other extreme, using the male bourgeois notion of equality and independence embodied in nineteenth century liberalism to urge women to demonstrate their strength by forming unions. In the process, however, the League, because of its middle-class leadership and their unfamiliarity with many of the trades conducted outside London, tended to idealise women's work in the nail and chain industries just as they did with the women working at the pit brow. As a working woman at the meeting at Lye stated, it was not a matter of choice for them but a matter of survival for their families.⁶⁸

This evidence suggests that Philippa Levine's arguments, discussed above, regarding the similarity of problems facing middle and working-class women in relation to employment need to be modified. She views the development of the Women's Protective and Provident League as part of a wider autonomous political movement of women in which claims on the basis of sisterhood went 'beyond...the parameters of class'.⁶⁹ Indeed, the League did speak of one of the benefits of unionism being a 'spirit of common sisterhood'.⁷⁰ Whilst not wishing to deny that the League did seek to overturn prevailing notions concerning women's weakness and inability to organise, I would argue, however, that in relation to working-class women the League tended to overlook or idealise the conditions of their labour,

⁶⁸ Women's Union Journal, Vol. VIII, No. 88 May 1883. p. 35. WTUL Papers.

⁶⁹ Philippa Levine, Victorian Feminism 1850-1900, Hutchinson, London 1987. p. 124.

⁷⁰ Second Annual Report of the Women's Protective and Provident League, June 1876. p. 3. History of Women 250.

thereby promoting the right to labour at the expense of a thorough-going critique of the conditions of labour and, therefore, also of capitalism itself. The idea of the right to labour had little or no relevance for most working-class women and when they supported the League against the implementation of protective legislation they did so because they had to work for their families to survive.

Moreover, Levine's argument that women's campaigns were of an entirely different order from those of men does not appear to hold water as far as trade unionism was concerned. The League, certainly in its early years, instead of organising differently from male unions, as we have seen replicated the dominant mode of unionism until the 1890s – that of craft unionism. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the League's two most successful unions, the Bookbinders and the Upholstresses, were in skilled trades and had received considerable assistance from the relevant men's unions, although their motives were not necessarily altruistic.⁷¹ Finally, to view the League as an autonomous feminist organisation is also misleading because a number of the unions established had male secretaries or presidents.⁷² Thus although the League did speak constantly of the need to promote self-help amongst women workers and of a common sisterhood, it is somewhat stretching the point to argue that this was an entirely different form of organisation from those existing among men.

Nevertheless, the League was influenced by feminist ideas. Levine has said that: 'The division between a feminist perspective and one which concerns itself with women's position and rights within the labour force

⁷¹ Virtually every Annual Report of the League thanks male trade unionists for their assistance in helping to establish a women's union.

⁷² Thus the Upholstresses Union was dissolved in 1901 because Mr. Leckie, who was its first secretary, was obliged to resign. Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union League. December 1901. p. 3. History of Women 250.

seems an artificial one.⁷³ Whilst bearing in mind that the right to labour had more resonance for middle-class women who were seeking to enter the professions than for working-class women, the middle-class women of the League did bring feminist ideas to their work.⁷⁴ The League's position on women's labour owed much to Mary Wollstonecraft's plea for formal equality for women within the public sphere. However, during the 1860s and 1870s a development was occurring within feminist thought which also had an influence upon the League. This was the notion that women constituted a sex-class which became perceptible during the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.⁷⁵ The appeal to the League of this argument was clear. The issue of women's rights regarding employment, like that of the suffrage, was one which seemingly applied to women across the classes. As the Englishwomen's Review wrote in 1876:

so long as there is 'class' legislation, so long as the law makes an insurmountable difference between men and women, women must be spoken of as a separate class. This is the only 'class' legislation remaining in England. We may justly boast that there is no law to prevent the son of a labourer or an artisan from rising to the highest offices in the State. We have abolished the slavery of colour...We have lowered the franchise...Class legislation may be said to have ceased as between man and man. It is still in full force between woman and man.⁷⁶

⁷³ P. Levine, *op. cit.* p. 109. However, Deborah Thom has written: 'Feminist historians have recently begun to rediscover the vitality and variety of suffrage organization at the local level. The same vigour and difference is noticeable in looking at trade unionism in any women's trade. The two were not integrally related. Women were divided by class, region and occupation more than they were united by gender except in a very few areas of suffrage movements.' 'The Bundle of Sticks: Women, Trade Unionists and Collective Organization before 1918' pp. 265-266.

⁷⁴ For an analysis of the differences between middle and working-class women see David Rubinstein, Before The Suffragettes. Women's Emancipation in the 1890s, Harvester, Brighton 1986. Part II. pp. 69-134.

⁷⁵ See Josephine Butler's letter to the Shield March 9 1870. Reprinted in Patricia Hollis, Women in Public: The Women's Movement 1850-1900, George Allen & Unwin, London 1979. p. 212.

⁷⁶ 'Women as a Class'. Englishwoman's Review, May 1876. Reprinted in *Ibid.* p. 336.

The League was formed at a point in the history of feminism when assertions of women's equality were evolving into the concept of women as a sex-class. And protective legislation was one area where this development became most evident. Opposition to protective legislation, on the grounds that it hampered women in their bid to compete equally with men, when linked with other legislation such as the franchise which singled out women by exclusion, could, and did, lead to the recognition that such legislation represented the oppression of one sex by another. Thus, it could be argued, all women were an oppressed class within society. Feminists then proceeded to turn this negative view of difference into a positive one. If women were different from men then they needed special legislation to positively reflect that difference.

The League's call for women factory inspectors represented just such a turning point in feminist arguments, for it was simultaneously a call for equality and a recognition that women workers had particular needs and problems at work which could only be discussed with another woman. This also helps in part to explain the League's closer organisational relationship with the male unions from this point onwards as assertions of difference coincided with male unionists' arguments about separate spheres. The very act of trying to organise working-class women was also instrumental in effecting this change of consciousness within the League. The work of Ann Ellis and Mrs Mason as working-class unionists proved to be exceptional rather than the rule. Women workers were generally unskilled, or perceived as such,⁷⁷ and poorly paid and therefore it became increasingly obvious that it was inappropriate to try and organise them in the manner of the male craft unions.

⁷⁷ For an interesting article which examines the ideological component of skill as opposed to 'objective' factors such as training and qualifications see Anne Phillips & Barbara Taylor, 'Sex and Skill: Notes Towards a Feminist Economics'. *Feminist Review*, Issue 6, 1980. pp. 79-88.

The transition from arguments based on equality to those based on difference and the organisational shift from independence to alliance constituted the central problematic of the League's policy on protective legislation. It was a policy aimed at securing the rights of women workers, who were overwhelmingly working class, but it was originally developed from a bourgeois male concept of equality which attempted to reverse its implicit androcentrism by asserting its application to women. Similarly, later arguments concerning gender difference which accepted the need for protective legislation also originated from the same source, albeit restated in a positive way. Accordingly, the terms of the debate, which had been set by men, remained fundamentally unchallenged. From both perspectives a feminine subjectivity was defined which was significantly impoverished – either woman was weak and helpless or she was as strong as the male worker. Neither position could ultimately accommodate the full complexity of working women's experiences, or reconcile the tension between difference and equality, because they were both based upon a divided view of society.

The League's growing relationship with the male unions occurred not simply as a result of a change in feminist thought regarding legislation and, therefore, also organisation. Several factors combined to encourage this development; the League's lack of success in recruiting women, the changing political and industrial climate of the 1880s which saw the growth of the new general labour unions at the end of the decade, and, emerging from these first two factors, a gradual distancing from the political views of the middle-class subscribers to the League. It was the combination of these three factors which laid the foundations for the future direction and policy of the League up to, and beyond, 1914.

In 1886 Emma Paterson claimed that ten societies had been formed in London, four of which had collapsed leaving a total paying membership of

between 600 and 700 women. In the provinces twenty-one societies had been formed of which only nine were still in existence. She attributed this failure to 'want of outside encouragement and advice'.⁷⁸ By 1886 the combined number of members of women's unions probably amounted to little more than 2,500,⁷⁹ of whom at least one half came from the London area, which was not even particularly noted for its trade union activity⁸⁰ During the same period, the number of women who were members of the cotton unions rose from 15,000 in 1876 to 39,000 in 1886.⁸¹ The problem, therefore, was not that women were not joining unions, but rather that they were joining unions which, either because they were mixed or because they did not agree with the aims of the League, did not affiliate. Paterson's speech highlighted the difficulties faced by the League. It was a London-based organisation when women workers in London were scattered and isolated in their own homes or in small workshops and the majority of women factory workers were outside the London area. As such it was incapable of reaching most working women.

By 1884, the relative failure of the League to form and sustain unions among women outside the London area, prompted Emma Paterson to publicly question the policy of the League and express her opinion of the direction it should take to further its work among women workers. Addressing a meeting at Balliol College, Oxford, on the position of working women, she declared that: 'Many good persons were afraid of it [the League], they liked the word 'provident', in the title, but not the word 'protective': people whose incomes were seven shillings an hour, or seven shillings a minute, were

⁷⁸ Women's Union Journal, Vol. XI. No. 126. July 1886. p. 68. WTUL Papers..

⁷⁹ Figures cited in B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions, p. 22.

⁸⁰ For information on women's unionism in London see Teresa Olcott, 'Dead Centre: The Women's Trade Union Movement in London 1874-1914', London Journal, Vol. 2. No. 1. May 1976. pp. 33-50. See also S. Lewenhak, Women and Trade Unions p, 71.

⁸¹ Figures cited in B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions p. 22.

ready enough to urge the poor to be provident and thrifty on seven shillings a week.⁸² The future, she believed, lay in stressing the protective, that is, the trade union side of the League, rather than the provident, or philanthropic side. Through statements such as this it was clear that there would be conflict between those members who had joined the League because of its seemingly philanthropic aims, and those who wanted the League to promote trade unionism.

Paterson's call for a change in emphasis upon the trade union aspect of the League occurred against the background of a trade depression and rising unemployment in the mid-1880s. This, along with the issue of Home Rule, as we have already seen in previous chapters, caused a crisis in the ruling Liberal Party. There was pressure for reform exerted from within the two governing parties as well as from below. The attack upon liberalism was based upon the recognition that individualism, as articulated by *laissez-faire* philosophy, needed to give way to the theory and practice of collectivism in relation particularly to the area of welfare reforms in order to respond to the economic distress.⁸³

However, the debate was not as clear-cut as this suggests because the term 'collectivism' embraced many different political positions ranging from radicals within the Liberal and Conservative parties to socialists. As Stefan Collini has written:

Those who did wish to champion the cause of Socialism or of increased Collectivism could resort to three main strategies for countering its *prima facie* undesirability...the three responses could be roughly characterized as those of the 'economic Socialist', the 'moral Socialist', and the 'progressive radical'...Many of the 'moral Socialists'...had wanted to claim that 'Socialism is, in fact, properly

⁸² Women's Union Journal, Vol. IX, No. 98 March 1884. pp. 20-21. WTUL Papers.

⁸³ For an interesting discussion of the debate between individualism and collectivism in this period see Stefan Collini, Liberalism and Sociology. L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England 1880-1914 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983. pp. 13-50..

considered, only the development of Liberalism under new conditions', but they had still insisted that it was in this transcendence of Liberalism that the superiority of Socialism lay. What distinguished the third response was the attempt to dissociate the favoured proposals from the charge of Socialism by suggesting that they merely involved an extension of the principles underlying Liberalism. This is the characteristic response of those who came to be called 'New Liberals'.⁸⁴

Indeed, it was precisely this difference in interpretation between the various philosophical and political objections to individualism which explains why some members of the League could assert the necessity for a change of policy and yet maintain an inflexible hostility towards socialism.

Whilst not a socialist herself, indeed she opposed them vehemently, Paterson too was not immune to the new ideas which were beginning to influence the labour movement generally.

I find that numbers of ladies and gentlemen are really anxious to help working women, in what they consider to be safe ways, only they continue to hold aloof from the League because they have an impression that we want to attack the employers, many of whom are their personal friends and are believed by them to be kind-hearted, just men who could not possibly oppress their workwomen.⁸⁵

Paterson proceeded to question whether, if this was their position, the League continued to need their support.

It has frequently been said to me 'If your League sought to form only *Benefit Societies* for women, we would gladly help; it is the trade aspect of the Unions that we object to,' and many letters come addressed 'Women's Provident League' or Provident and Protective, - Protective being considered a secondary matter. Everyone is anxious that women who work should be *provident*, but are not always equally anxious that they should have the *means* of being provident, in the shape of better wages and shorter hours of work, which would mean increased opportunities for thought of the future, and for study. The help such timid people would offer seems to me to be of no more value,

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 36-38.

⁸⁵ Women's Union Journal, Vol. XI. No. 126. July 1886. p. 69. WTUL Papers.

perhaps of less value, than that of the Army Clothing Factory authorities who in the pressure of war orders in the spring of last year required the women to work all Sundays, but at the same time provided missionaries to read aloud to them the Bible, and other good books, to which, I fear, in the driving atmosphere of piece work not much attention was paid.⁸⁶

She ended her speech by saying that unless more groups could be established in industrial centres, the League should seriously consider its future as an organisation.⁸⁷

Paterson's development in feminist thought with regard to the aims and organisation of women's trade unionism was made clear just before her death when she said in 1886: 'wherever it is practicable, and the men will agree to it, we are strongly in favour of mixed Societies, consisting of men and women working in the same trade.'⁸⁸ This development had received its impetus from a combination of two factors. Firstly, the belief that reliance upon philanthropy both alienated the support of the men's unions and, moreover, had resulted in an over emphasis upon the provident aspect of the League. Secondly, when this acknowledgement was taken to its logical conclusion the recognition of a more interventionist role on the part of the state naturally followed, especially when the Trades Union Congress was itself debating the question of an eight hour day from the mid-1880s.⁸⁹ Such a recognition, as we have seen, was not restricted to liberals, socialists were also prominent in calling for this development.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Women's Union Journal, Vol. XI, No. 126, July 1886, p. 68. WTUL Papers..

⁸⁹ This is not to argue that the League was in favour of an Eight Hours Bill. At the TUC conference of September 1887, Eleanor Whyte of the Bookbinders Union stated her agreement with Broadhurst's opposition to this proposal. Women's Union Journal, Vol. XII, No. 140 September 1887, p. 71. WTUL Papers. However, when the TUC Parliamentary Committee issued a circular to all unions on this question, the League objected to the biased comments in it which were intended to influence unions into voting against the resolution. Women's Union Journal, Vol. XII, No. 142, November 1887, pp. 83-85. WTUL Papers.

With the death of Emma Paterson in 1886 political differences erupted when those members of the League who were also members of socialist organisations believed that the League should encourage political agitation by trade unions. One of the League's earliest members, Stewart Headlam argued, at a conference held 'to invite and discuss suggestions as to extending the work of the League',⁹⁰ that:

good as Trades Unionism was, it would never by itself get rid of poverty. Therefore we should urge the women to take part in political movements. With the view of bringing this question to a point, he would move the following Resolution;- "That the best way to extend the work of the League is to lay stress on its Protective - Trades Union - element as distinct from the Provident element, and further, for the League to use its influence to support such Political action of an economic description as will tend to bring about a better distribution of wealth".⁹¹

Headlam's resolution not only implied that trade unions should use the strike weapon to improve their economic position, it also, for the first time, suggested that the League should ally itself with socialist groups whose aims were to bring about a redistribution of wealth: namely, the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League.⁹²

Although liberals and socialists alike believed that the League would not survive unless it changed both in terms of organisation and aims, there was considerable internal dissension within the League as to how this was to be carried out. In October 1886, the liberal viewpoint was summed up by J.H. Levy, one of the earliest members of the League's council, in a letter to the annual conference. He wrote that: 'the second half of Mr. Headlam's resolution, if carried, would turn the League into a Socialistic association,

⁹⁰ Women's Union Journal, Vol. XI. No. 126. July 1886 p. 67. WTUL Papers.

⁹¹ *Ibid* p. 70.

⁹² Headlam's resolution was finally carried although the word 'political' was omitted. See Women's Union Journal, Vol. XI. No. 129. October 1886. p. 97. WTUL Papers.

and make it impossible for all persons who, like myself, are opposed to Socialism, to co-operate with the League in future.'⁹³ Similarly, Lady Dilke argued that she would be 'extremely grieved to see the society used for other than pure Trades Union purposes'.⁹⁴

Such statements occurred at a time when London was being swept by a series of riots of unemployed workers in which the various socialist societies played a leading role. Considerable public sympathy was aroused by the plight of the unemployed⁹⁵ to which the League was not immune.⁹⁶ This sympathy, along with the fact that the League was going through a period of considerable dissension, not just between liberals and socialists but also between those who wanted the League to continue primarily as a philanthropic body and those who recognised the need for change, may explain the election of Clementina Black, a socialist, to the position of secretary following the death of Emma Paterson in 1886. The success of the socialists was, however, shortlived.

As a socialist, Black had, in 1888, become involved in the Matchwomen's strike at the Bryant and May factory. It was shown in the previous two chapters that socialist women led the way in organising unskilled women workers. The strike of the matchwomen, who were led by Annie Besant, led to the formation of the first ever union of unskilled women workers. At the inaugural meeting of the Union of Women Matchmakers held on the 17th July 1888, Clementina Black was not only in attendance, she also used her

⁹³ Women's Union Journal Vol. XI. No. 129. October 1886. p. 96. WTUL Papers..

⁹⁴ Quoted in T. Olcott, 'Dead Centre: The Women's Trade Union Movement in London, 1874-1914'. p. 41.

⁹⁵ See Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London. A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society. Peregrine, Harmondsworth 1984. pp. 297-300.

⁹⁶ During the dockworkers strike, for example, in 1889 the League raised the sum of £400 for the strikers at a time when its own finances were in a parlous state. See B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions p. 26.

knowledge and experience from her years with the League to advise them on rules, subscriptions and elections. By the end of that year the union had changed both its name and rules, becoming the Matchmakers Union with membership open to both women and men.⁹⁷ Thus, from the matchwomen's strike was to emerge the first general labour union which opened its doors to workers of both sexes. Despite Black's involvement in the formation of the union, the League itself claimed to have taken no 'active part, although it was, of course, in full sympathy with it'.⁹⁸

The formation of this union and the involvement of Black led directly to her resignation from the League in 1889 and to the emergence of a separate organisation, the Women's Trade Union Association whose purpose was: 'to establish self-managed and self-supporting Trade Unions, over which no person outside the Union should have any control whatever'.⁹⁹ In October 1889 Black and other members of the Women's Trade Union Association, including such socialists as John Burns, H.H. Champion and Ben Cooper, circulated a letter which was reprinted in the Women's Union Journal. In this letter they stated that:

The recent strike of the London dock labourers has revealed a capacity for organisation and self-control, and therefore self-help, even among the poorest and most casual of men-workers. But there is in the East End a vast body of workers whose wages and circumstances are even more unfortunate than those of the dock labourers. We refer to the women who toil in underpaid industries of all kinds...Almsgiving cannot help these women...A properly managed trade union not only improves the material position of its members, but develops many of the qualities which make good citizens...We propose, therefore, to establish

⁹⁷ See S. Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement pp. 50-51.

⁹⁸ Fifteenth Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union Provident League, July 1889. p. 5. History of Women.

⁹⁹ First Report of the Women's Trade Union Association 1889-1890 Reprinted in Ellen Mappin, Helping Women at Work. The Women's Industrial Council 1889-1914 Hutchinson, London 1985. p. 34. The WTUA became the Women's Industrial Council in 1894, which saw itself primarily as a political pressure group. Ibid. p. 16.

a committee whose object will be to help East End working women to form themselves into trade unions.¹⁰⁰

The response from the League to this new Association was qualified, but their feelings regarding the formation of a rival group may be gauged from this reply:

We shall then, indeed, rejoice if these new friends of the movement succeed in doing more than we have done, and we heartily wish them success. Nevertheless, we are inclined to think that union among the founders and friends of such societies, as well as among the workers, is most desirable if the work is to be carried out with effect, and we cannot but regret that it should have been decided to start a new organisation.¹⁰¹

Such a cautiously worded reply gives little hint of the actual reasons behind the formation of the Women's Trade Union Association and the split from the League by Black. The reasons included not simply a hostility on the part of the League to socialist activity within the union movement but also a more general hostility to the use of industrial action for political purposes. As one member of the League, Ada Heather-Bigg declared: 'could we but tear the mask from some forms of socialistic philosophy we should find we have before us not a champion come to deliver the bond-slaves of industry but a tyrant riveting their chains even while he seems to strike them off.'¹⁰² Less overtly antagonistic, but no less firm in its rebuttal of the socialists was Lady Dilke's statement that: 'New Unionism...appears on examination to be but the old unionism proceeding by more haphazard and sensational methods.'¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Women's Union Journal, Vol. XIV. No. 165. October 15th 1889. p. 77. WTUL Papers.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 78.

¹⁰² Quoted in T. Olcott, 'Dead Centre: The Women's Trade Union Movement in London, 1874-1914'. p. 40.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 41.

From 1889 until her death in 1904 the League was dominated by the personality of Lady Dilke. Her niece, Gertrude Tuckwell, later wrote of the complexion of the League when Lady Dilke came to power and the extent to which her views modified it.

The unpopularity of Trade Unionism was even then so great that help would not have been forthcoming for the League had not its pioneers gone warily both in its work and name. It had other limitations in those days, for women's legal disabilities were terrible, and it was inevitable that certain elements of feminism should enter into the minds of many of the League's promoters. It is difficult to realize now the breadth of vision which was then required to see that the industrial interests of the sexes are identical and that protective legislation does not hamper, but emancipates...I do not think that it is too much to say that the disappearance of all feminism in her attitude to public life was as much due to the influence of her correspondent's wide point of view,¹⁰⁴ as to her growing breadth of outlook.¹⁰⁵

Tuckwell's observations, which concur remarkably with those of Beatrice Webb at the start of this chapter, were written after both the League and the National Federation of Women Workers had ceased to exist following amalgamation with their largely all-male counterparts in 1921. They were, therefore, written with the benefit of hindsight as well as with the intention to express sentiments which accorded with the position of women's unionism at the time of writing. Such observations were, primarily, both a reflection of the post-war position of women's trade unionism and a denial of the struggles which continued to take place over protective legislation up to 1914. They reflected also the desire to disassociate the League from charges of middle-class bias at a point in the League's history when it had appeared to have successfully overcome such charges by uniting with the Trades Union Congress. Indeed, the omission of

¹⁰⁴ This is a reference to Sir Charles Dilke whom she married in 1885 but with whom she had corresponded on industrial matters for a number of years before this event.

¹⁰⁵ Gertrude M. Tuckwell, A Short Life of Sir Charles Dilke Student Bookshops, London 1925. p. 86.

all references to debate over protective legislation in Tuckwell's work itself suggests that there was no simple transition from feminist analyses of trade unionism to those which advocated coincidence of interest between women and men workers. An examination of Lady Dilke's attitude towards women's trade unionism reveals just how protracted and complicated was this transition.

In 1890 Lady Dilke declared in an article on 'Trades Unionism For Women':

Now, I am not opposed on principle, as many of my friends are, to all State interference with freedom of private contract, and it has always seemed to me that to sit quietly watching the operation of the laws of social and political economy in an attitude of respectable fatalism is an absolutely untenable position on the part of a convinced Trades Unionist. I am perfectly ready to accept State aid whenever it can do something for me which I can't do for myself; but I am unwilling to appeal to State legislation except as a last resource.¹⁰⁶

This qualified support for legislative protection was, however, accompanied by a pragmatic approach to the question of women's labour.

When we see, for the first time, the hideous results of unchecked competition between women and men, it is only natural that our instant impulse should be to fly to prohibitive legislation; that we should fancy that the only course open to us is the prohibition of women's labour, and her entire relegation to her natural and sacred sphere of home, to the fulfilment in blessed leisure of her natural and sacred functions of mother and wife. But on reflection we see that it is impossible to overlook the conditions which, rightly or wrongly, regulate modern life. The choice for these girls, as for so many others, does not lie between home and the market-place; it lies between the market-place and the streets.¹⁰⁷

Dilke's words reveal the contradictions inherent within the League in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the complex inheritance of

¹⁰⁶ Emilia F. S. Dilke, 'Trades Unionism For Women'. New Review. January 1890. pp. 45-46. BLHE 1880-1900.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 47.

feminist ideas bequeathed to women at that time. The advocacy of state intervention only as a last resort reflects a transitional stage in feminist thought from assertions of equality to those of difference. Within the work of Dilke during this period the feminist legacy of Mary Wollstonecraft was joined by that of John Stuart Mill, by whom Dilke was strongly influenced,¹⁰⁸ for she was able to argue that women had the right to paid employment whilst believing that women's natural sphere was the home and the family.

This inheritance was joined, in Dilke's case, by a further factor - the moralism of evangelicalism. Whilst this influence can be seen in Dilke's statement regarding women's natural sphere, it was also evident in the manner in which she perceived trade unionism - as the earlier Evangelicals viewed their mission to reform the morals of English society - as a form of personal struggle through which the individual achieved communion with God and realised Christianity on earth.

The gospel of Trades Unionism, rightly understood, is the most Christian gospel that can be preached, but to preach it worthily there must be personal devotion and personal effort; not merely willingness to forego the pleasures of society and the pleasures of charity, but willingness to try to understand the true bearing of the difficult questions, economical and social, which are involved, - and which will often be found to affect the smallest detail of a trade organisation, - and willingness to learn also what work really means.¹⁰⁹

We have already seen in the previous two chapters how there was a tendency towards moral conservatism, and the proclamation of separate spheres, within those who regarded activism, be it within socialist groups or through the trade union movement, as a religious crusade. Although Dilke herself was not a socialist until the very end of her life - only one month before her

¹⁰⁸ See T. Olcott, 'Dead Centre: The Women's Trade Union Movement in London, 1874-1914', p. 42.

¹⁰⁹ E. Dilke, 'Trades Unionism For Women', p. 52.

death in October 1904 she resigned from the Women's Liberal Association declaring that she now 'entirely belonged to the Labour Party and the Labour cause'¹¹⁰ - a similar moral conservatism can be said to have informed her ideas.

The League, under Dilke's leadership was not just drawing closer to the male union movement ideologically in terms of an acceptance of separate spheres, organisational changes were introduced which also facilitated this process. Before her death, as already stated, Emma Paterson had set in motion the seeds for organisational change by arguing in favour of mixed unions. This was formalised in 1889 when Dilke introduced a scheme 'under which any *bonâ fide* trade union admitting women to membership was invited to affiliate to the League for a small fee of one halfpenny per head for a female member, while the League offered in return the service of a woman organizer'.¹¹¹ This change in policy was so successful that in the ten years between 1886 and 1896 the number of women unionists rose from about 37,000 to nearly 118,000. The following ten years saw a further, but slower, increase with the numbers rising to about 167,000 in 1906, of which figure Barbara Drake estimated that probably no more than 5,000 were from all-women unions.¹¹² In her time as leader of the League, then, Lady Dilke witnessed a five-fold increase in the number of women unionists.

Clearly the League needed to change given the low levels of union participation rates that it had achieved for women in the first twelve years of its existence and the explosive growth of the new general labour unions which were rapidly enrolling women as members. The problems the League

¹¹⁰ See the entry for Lady Dilke in J. M. Bellamy & J. Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 3, p. 66.

¹¹¹ G. Tuckwell, A Short Life of Sir Charles Dilke, p. 319. See also B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions, p. 30. The details of the affiliation scheme were set out in the Sixteenth Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union Provident League, July 1890, p. 5. History of Women.

¹¹² Figures cited in B. Drake, Women in Trade Unions, p. 30.

faced were two-fold. Firstly, it had concentrated its attention upon London when the majority of women workers lived outside the capital. Secondly, it had organised those unions along the lines of craft unions when, once again, the majority of women workers did not fall into that category.¹¹³ Bearing in mind that at the time when the League was failing to enrol women in unions in any significant numbers the cotton unions experienced a sharp rise women members it is hardly surprising that the League should look to the cotton industry as an example of what could be achieved by mixed unions. However, the cotton industry was atypical of industry as a whole because it negotiated wages on the basis of the rate for the job and not on the gender of the worker, thereby achieving in theory at least the principle of equal pay.¹¹⁴

It was her recognition of these two particular problems that led Lady Dilke to initiate two important policies, apart from her scheme regarding affiliation to the League. The first concerned the appointment of paid working-class women organisers for the League and the second concerned an alliance with the Manchester Trades Council which led to the formation of the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council in 1895.¹¹⁵ The first working-class woman organiser employed by the League in 1892 was

¹¹³ In 1881 76% of women workers were concentrated in four main occupations: domestic service, textile workers, the clothing trade and teaching. Of these four categories, domestic service accounted for 36%. Figures cited in Jane Lewis, Women in England 1870-1950. Sexual Divisions and Social Change. Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex 1984. p. 156.

¹¹⁴ For further information see S. Boston, Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement. p. 23. In most cases equal pay remained the theory rather than the practice because women and men did different jobs within the industry. The women tended to be concentrated in the semi-and unskilled occupations whilst the men monopolised the skilled positions..

¹¹⁵ For further information on this organisation see Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us. The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement. Virago, London 1978. pp. 38-39.

Annie Marland, a representative of the cotton unions.¹¹⁶ At the 1894 Trades Union Congress she became the first woman ever to represent the cotton unions nationally as their delegate.¹¹⁷ Behind this move by Dilke lay not only her desire to promote the activities of the League in the north of England where the majority of women unionists were concentrated but also her belief that working-class women, through this experience, would eventually lead their own organisations.

It is because I have seen this sort of shipwreck threatening disaster to women's unions more than once [i.e. the frequent failure of trade unions due to insufficient funds and poor management] that I am anxious to ask all those - without respect of class - who have capacity, independence, and leisure sufficient, for help in the difficult first years of these enterprises. I do not think it would be at all desirable that the unions should permanently be managed by any others than the workers themselves, but I do believe that the richer women, when competent, might do most valuable work in educating their struggling sisters in the important matters of administration and business economy.¹¹⁸

Whilst Dilke's desire for self-supporting unions resembled in many respects the views put forward by Clementina Black and others which prompted the formation of the Women's Trade Union Association in 1889, there were, as Dilke's statement suggests, considerable differences between the two. Dilke's perception of the need for help from outside the union movement, in contradistinction to that of the Women's Trade Union Association, accorded with the vision of working women as weak and helpless. These differences in perception, although they first became a

¹¹⁶ Later organisers included Sarah Reddish, Ada Nield Chew, Sarah Dickenson and Helen Silcock, all of whom were also involved in the campaign for the suffrage and were members of the various socialist societies in existence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹¹⁷ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us pp. 88-89.

¹¹⁸ Emilia F. S. Dilke, 'The Seamy Side of Trades Unionism For Women'. New Review, May 1890. p. 422. BLHE 1880-1900.

source of tension within the League in the 1880s following the emergence of socialist members, did not provoke a long-term debate until dissension arose within the ranks of Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council in the early years of the twentieth century.

To argue that the industrial interests of women and men were identical, as Tuckwell later claimed with reference to Dilke's changing concept of trade unionism, actually served to cement the process whereby women workers were seen as different and marginal, whilst in fact ignoring the specific disabilities that women suffered as workers. For identity of interest rested upon the acceptance of policies regarding women workers which challenged neither the dominant ideological view of women as inhabiting a separate sphere nor the privileged industrial position of the male worker. The attempt to expunge all accusations of class bias within the League ultimately resulted in the denial of gender antagonism within the working class. As Mary Macarthur, arguably the most powerful woman trade unionist from 1906 until her death in 1921, stated, trade unionism was 'a race question, not a sex question'.¹¹⁹ For her, 'the great value of Trades Unions is that they may become schools of social and economic education...I deprecate with all the feeling of which I am capable any attempt to create sex antagonism between the men and women in industry'.¹²⁰ What Tuckwell represented as a great step forward for women's unionism, with a shift in focus away from the promulgation of feminist policies toward those which advocated class solidarity, must also be viewed, then, as a complex mediation of gendered ideology which sought to transcend its boundaries whilst being constrained within a framework founded upon that ideology.

¹¹⁹ M. A. Hamilton, Mary Macarthur. A Biographical Sketch Leonard Parsons, London 1925. p. 45.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 42.

Dilke's views, however, were not shared by all members of the League. Isabella Ford had been introduced to the work of the League in 1885 by Emma Paterson who was a friend of her mother.¹²¹ By July 1888 she had established a society of working women from various trades in Leeds with 105 members.¹²² Later that same year a strike broke out amongst women employed in a woollen weaving mill in Leeds. Together with the support of Allen Gee of the West Riding of Yorkshire Power Loom Weavers' Association, a mixed union, Ford helped to form a Leeds branch enrolling over 200 of the women strikers.¹²³ In March 1889 another strike broke out at the firm of Colbeck's near Wakefield and again Ford joined forces with Gee to unionise the women.¹²⁴ By this time, Ford was coming into close contact with the socialists in her area, particularly Tom Maguire and Alf Mattison of the Socialist League.¹²⁵ In October 1889, she became embroiled in yet another strike, this time involving 900 tailoresses from the Arthur factory in Leeds. The women were on strike because 1d. out of every shilling earned was deducted for power, they were forced to buy their thread inside the factory where the prices were higher, and an extra 2d. was deducted for cooking and dining utensils and for charity.¹²⁶ After a month on strike the Tailoresses Union numbered nearly two thousand, but the numbers dwindled as the strike continued. These experiences were to make Ford an expert in women's work

¹²¹ See June Hannam, Isabella Ford Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1989. p. 31.

¹²² Fifteenth Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union Provident League, July 1889. pp. 9-10. History of Women.

¹²³ *Ibid.* pp. 10-11.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹²⁵ See J. Hannam. *op. cit.* pp. 36-37. This was not her first contact with socialism however. Edward Pease of the Fabian Society was her cousin and she had been present at the first meeting which led to the founding of the Fabian Society. *Ibid.* p. 27.

¹²⁶ Sixteenth Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union Provident League, July 1890. pp. 11-12. History of Women

in Yorkshire.¹²⁷ But they were also to help her view trade unionism as part of a wider, socialist struggle.

In 1900, Ford wrote that the issue of trade unionism for women involved not merely an improvement in their industrial conditions but a complete revolution in consciousness.

All the orthodox religious world, broadly speaking, is against Trade Unionism for women (except theoretically), because Trade Unionism means rebellion, and the orthodox teaching for women is submission in this world in order to gain happiness in the next world...The political world preaches to women submission, so long as it refuses them the Parliamentary franchise and, therefore, ignores them as human beings. Society encourages selfish indifference amongst women in that it considers a woman's home must make her sacrifice to it everyone else's home, and all public honour. Those are the forces we have to fight, and it is only when we have fought them successfully that the Trade Union movement will widen out into a really great and saving power.¹²⁸

It was to be through women such as Isabella Ford that Morris and Carpenter's vision of the new world was transmitted to the campaign for the economic independence of working-class women, for she believed, as did Morris and Carpenter, that: 'every form of conventional thought must be fought, particularly amongst the workers themselves. Real Trade Unionism for women means a moral and industrial revolution, and many people dread a revolution. They prefer stagnation, particularly for women.'¹²⁹ Effecting a change of consciousness, as Ford recognised, was a difficult task. It was also one which could not be accomplished whilst middle-class women purported to speak for all women. Accordingly, she declared that:

¹²⁷ J. Hannam. *op. cit.* p. 41.

¹²⁸ I. O. Ford, 'Women As Trade Unionists'. Women's Trade Union Review No. 36. January 1900. p. 12. WTUL Papers.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

one thing is necessary for us to remember, viz., that the industrial woman must work out her freedom for herself. We cannot, we have no right to do it for her. We cannot possibly know her needs so well as she herself can. Or perhaps I should say, as she herself will, when we have helped her to find a voice whereby she can express her needs, and above all, when we have given her a knowledge of what freedom really is, and how it can be gained by desiring and aiming at the best and highest – a desire of which she is as capable as any one of us in all the world.¹³⁰

The crucial difference here between Dilke and Ford's view of industrial organisation for women, like that mentioned earlier between Dilke and Black, lay in the nature of trade union organisation and in an understanding of how gender intersected class solidarity, for although both advocated that ideally unions should be run by the workers themselves, Dilke still believed that the assistance of the leisured classes was necessary. Ford's words, however, betrayed a differing concern from Dilke when she wrote: 'The indifference, and more than indifference, of parents and husbands about their daughters and wives being Trade Unionists is more wide spread than many people notice...'¹³¹ Through her recognition of the need for a change of consciousness Ford came close to an analysis of gendered ideology as structuring and informing all facets of social existence. The structure of gender relations within the family was seen to have an impact upon the structure of gender relations within the workforce and, specifically, upon women's participation rates in trade unionism. Whilst the existence of gendered ideology remained unacknowledged and the 'common sense' of the working class remained unchallenged the voices of working-class women could not be heard and the essential prerequisite for an altered society – a change of consciousness – could not be effected. As June Hannam has

¹³⁰ Isabella O. Ford, Industrial Women and How To Help Them. Humanitarian League, London 1908. pp. 11–12. SLTB Part 4, 1908–1911. 1908/17.

¹³¹ I. O. Ford, 'Women As Trade Unionists'. Women's Trade Union Review. No. 36. January 1900. p. 12. WTUL Papers.

argued, in relation to Ford's trade union activity, she: 'was always concerned to integrate her feminist politics into the mainstream socialist movement, and to change the attitudes of men as well as women.'¹³² Hannam, too, rejects Levine's analysis that all feminists in the trade union movement sought to develop an entirely different set of woman-centred values.¹³³

By the time that Lady Dilke arrived at the opinion that the heart of trade unionist activity for women and the future for the League lay in the north of England, and particularly in the regions of Lancashire and Yorkshire, many working-class women in those areas had already become involved in the socialist movement. Furthermore, those who were involved in the textile industry also had considerable experience of trade union organisation. What was of particular note about some of these women was that they did not divorce their trade union activities from other political and social movements. In reading the number of small biographies of these women provided by Liddington and Norris in their work on the 'radical suffragists' what is striking is the range of different organisations to which these women belonged.¹³⁴ For example, Selina Cooper, one of the more prominent of the working-class women activists who was a winder from Nelson in Lancashire, was a member of the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party, the Women's Co-operative Guild and, between the years 1906 and 1914, was an organiser for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.¹³⁵

The Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council, formed in 1895, initially resembled the League very closely, for like the latter organisation,

¹³² J. Hannam. *op. cit.* p. 69.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us pp. 288-292.

¹³⁵ For a detailed account of Selina Cooper's life and work see Jill Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel. Selina Cooper 1864-1946 Virago, London 1984.

it was heavily supported by middle-class sympathisers, and it was also to appoint two working-class women as full-time organisers.¹³⁶ Indeed, in its early years the development of the Women's Trade Union Council paralleled in a remarkable fashion that of the Women's Protective and Provident League for not only were its leading members also involved in the campaign for the suffrage, as had been Emma Paterson, the first union established by the Council was the Manchester and Salford Society of Women Employed in the Bookbinding and Printing Trades. Where it was to differ from the League was in the fact that the women to whom it appealed were becoming highly politicised through their contacts with the active socialist groups in the north of England during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Thus, from the start, the Women's Trade Union Council was appealing to women who had already made the connections between trade union activity and the larger socialist vision of a re-ordered world. Such connections were not limited solely to those women who could draw upon their own experiences of the material conditions of life in the cotton factories; middle class women, as we saw in previous chapters, were also instrumental in making the connections between socialism and feminism. Two women in particular were crucial for the development of a socialist feminist movement in the

¹³⁶ These were Frances Ashwell and Sarah Dickenson. Dickenson had, since 1889, been secretary of the Manchester and Salford Association of Machine, Electrical and Other Women Workers. Background information on the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council comes from J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us.

north of England; Esther Roper¹³⁷ and Eva Gore-Booth.¹³⁸ Like their counterparts in Bristol a few years earlier, such as Helena Born, Miriam Daniell and Enid Stacy, Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth were middle-class women who were at the forefront of the campaign for the political, economic and social rights of working-class women.

Politicisation for middle-class women such as Roper and Gore-Booth could arise as the result of several factors; through family connections, through direct contact with socialist and feminist groups, or simply through their own observations. For Esther Roper, a graduate of Owen's College, (which later became Manchester University), the crucial factor appears to have been her initial involvement with the group formed by Lydia Becker in the late 1860s, the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage. It was in this society that she met the Pankhurst family and Isabella Ford. Similarly Eva Gore-Booth became politicised through both the suffrage campaign and the struggle for Irish nationalism.

In 1904, a similar split between liberals and socialists occurred within the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council as that between Clementina Black and the Women's Protective and Provident League in 1889. By November, the socialist faction, led by Dickenson and Gore-Booth, resigned from the main body to form the Manchester and Salford Women's

¹³⁷ Esther Roper, 1868-1938, was the secretary of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage [later re-named the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage] from 1893-1905. In 1894 she organised a Special Appeal for the suffrage among working-class women in the north of England. In 1903 she was a member of the group of mainly working-class women who formed the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and other Workers' Representation Committee. Biographical details of Roper's life can be found in Gifford Lewis, *Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper. A Biography*, Pandora Press, London 1988.

¹³⁸ Eva Gore-Booth, 1870-1926, with her sister Constance [later Countess Markievicz of Sinn Féin fame] had started a women's suffrage society in Sligo in 1896. By 1899 she was a member of the executive of the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage. In 1900 she became, with Sarah Dickenson, co-secretary of the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council following the decision of Frances Ashwell to marry. See also G. Lewis, op. cit. & Amanda Sebestyen, intro., *Prison Letters of Countess Markievicz*, Virago, London 1987.

Trade and Labour Council.¹³⁹ They took with them several unions and at least two thousand members, including those most active in the women's trade union movement; Nellie Keenan, secretary of the Power Loom Weavers' Association, Evelyn Tonkin, secretary of the Women's Branch of the Shirt and Jacket Workers, Isabel Forsyth, secretary of the Society of Women in the Bookbinding and Printing Trades, Nellie Kay, secretary of the Tailoresses Union, and Violet Whalley, secretary of the Winders' Trade Union.¹⁴⁰ This left the Women's Trade Union Council with a membership of only around one hundred.¹⁴¹ In that same year, 1904, Lady Dilke died. She was replaced as president of the Women's Trade Union League by her niece Gertrude Tuckwell.¹⁴² One year previously, Mary Macarthur had been appointed as full-time secretary to the League.¹⁴³ Both these women were socialists so there was, therefore, reason to expect close co-operation between the London and Manchester groups. That such co-operation did not

¹³⁹ Liddington and Norris suggest that Christabel Pankhurst engineered the split by forcing the issue of the suffrage upon the Women's Trade Union Council when it considered itself to be a non-political body. Such a suggestion, given Pankhurst's inexperience at the time when compared with the other socialist women involved in the Women's Trade Union Council, appears to be untenable. See *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, pp. 177-179.

¹⁴⁰ See the letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, November 11, 1904. GTC 604/5.

¹⁴¹ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, p. 179.

¹⁴² Gertrude Tuckwell, 1861-1951, was a teacher by profession. In 1891 she became a member of the Women's Trade Union League and one year later became Lady Dilke's secretary. Like her father before her, Tuckwell was a Christian Socialist. See her entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 6. Macmillan, London 1982. pp. 253-259.

¹⁴³ Mary Macarthur, 1880-1921, started work as a book-keeper in her father's drapery business. In 1901 she became involved in the Shop Assistants' Union and two years later was elected to the national executive of the union. This work led to her becoming secretary of the Women's Trade Union League in 1903. In 1906 she founded the National Federation of Women Workers, a general labour union. From 1909-1912 she was a member of the National Administrative Council of the ILP. She died on the day that the National Federation of Women Workers merged with the Women's Section of the National Union of General Workers. See her entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 2. Macmillan, London 1974. pp. 255-260.

emerge was to do with the question of married women's employment and protective and prohibitive legislation.

The period from the turn of the century, when the Boer War was still in progress, to the outbreak of the First World War was characterised by a proliferation of welfare reforms, particularly during the years of the Liberal administration from 1906 to 1911. In 1906, John Burns, one-time member of the Social Democratic Federation and one of the leaders of the London dock strike in 1889, was given a seat in the Liberal Cabinet as President of the Local Government Board, which assumed responsibility for unemployment. In this position Burns declared that: 'Women's labour, especially married women's labour, must be enormously curtailed.'¹⁴⁴ The discovery of the poor levels of fitness of recruits for the Boer War accelerated concern over the future of the race. This concern, involving as it did a complex web of industrial, social and political factors,¹⁴⁵ coalesced around the role of the state on questions of motherhood and maternity. Thus Mary Macarthur could refer to trade unionism as 'a race question',¹⁴⁶ Katharine Bruce Glasier could declare that 'she would vote for the wholesale prohibition of married women's labour',¹⁴⁷ and Ethel Snowden, the wife of the Labour M.P. Phillip Snowden, could argue that under socialism 'married women with children will not work in the factory; at least until the children are out of their hands'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Reported in Reynolds Newspaper, April 25 1909. GTC 23/11.

¹⁴⁵ For an excellent discussion all these factors and the role they played in the development of an ideology of motherhood see Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood'. History Workshop Journal Issue 5, Spring 1978. pp. 9-65.

¹⁴⁶ M. A. Hamilton, Mary Macarthur. A Biographical Sketch, p. 45.

¹⁴⁷ Reported in Reynolds Newspaper, April 25 1909. GTC 23/11.

¹⁴⁸ Ethel Snowden, The Woman Socialist, George Allen, London 1907. p. 81.

It was against this background of state intervention that disagreements between women trade unionists emerged. Working-class women activists - almost all of whom tended to be married themselves - were particularly alarmed by this development towards the prohibition of married women's labour. Selina Cooper, a friend and supporter of Gore-Booth and Roper:

was opposed to legislation that would prohibit married women working in the mills, although she did not as a principle advocate that they should be wage-earners under all circumstances. In political and economic controversy the importance of the cotton and allied industries directed special attention to the working conditions, hence when the abnormal infantile mortality of the Lancashire towns was revealed it was superficially assumed by politicians that the cause was to be found in the mothers going to work in the mills. It was overlooked that these women were working out their economic freedom, having already attained to "equal pay for equal work." This...was where the constructive part of Socialism should begin; and rather than woman regarded as an unfair competitor in the labour market, she must take her place side by side with men in working out the social salvation of their class.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, Ada Nield Chew, who worked as an organiser for the Women's Trade Union League between 1900 and 1908, argued:

Middle-class mothers do not keep their babies in their arms night and day; but they would be offended if one suggested that they are worse mothers than working-class women. Many Lancashire women leave their babies ten hours a day (much too long); but only politicians of the Burns-type imagine them to be lacking in maternal love on that account...Well, slaves should break their chains, and they who want women to be free should help in the chain-breaking, not try to rivet the links closer by advocating domestic teaching in *all* schools for *all* girls...But if we insisted on training girls to be human instead of merely feminine, and brought them up with the idea that it is disgraceful not to serve humanity, and that to be dependent for the necessities of life upon either an individual or society without giving back in return is immoral and dishonest, girls would naturally rebel against the narrow world circumscribed by household drudgery...The time is passing when either a class or a sex must necessarily be

¹⁴⁹ Speech reported in the Portsmouth Evening News, October 30 1914. GTC 360/8.

sacrificed to the privileges demanded by another class or sex, and women must either help in the passing or remain a drag on progress.¹⁵⁰

Clearly, as Beatrice Webb suggested in her quotation which opened this chapter, there was a class dimension to the debate on women's labour. But class was not always the determining factor. Rather, it was intersected at all points in the debate by differing conceptions of feminism and socialism. Therefore it is not possible to speak of a united working-class women's position. Selina Cooper, for example, was a supporter of the proposal for the endowment of motherhood¹⁵¹ whilst Ada Nield Chew opposed it vehemently on the grounds that it transferred woman's dependency from the husband on to the state.¹⁵²

But if working-class women activists disagreed over specific proposals they were nonetheless united in their view of women as active agents in the struggle for economic rights. In the disputes which arose between the Women's Trade Union League and the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade and Labour Council over protective legislation between 1907 and 1911 the substantive issue was not whether florists, barworkers or pit-brow women in particular, should have their labour protected or prohibited altogether but whether working women should have the right to a voice in their own economic affairs. Moreover, this was an issue which, in the light of official suggestions that married women should not engage in paid labour, gained a new sense of urgency.

¹⁵⁰ Ada Nield Chew, 'The Problem of the Married Working Woman', Common Cause, March 6 1914. Reprinted in Doris Nield Chew, ed., Ada Nield Chew. The Life and Writings of a Working Woman, Virago, London 1982. pp. 232-233.

¹⁵¹ See J. Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel, p. 159.

¹⁵² See her article 'Mother-Interest and Child-Training', The Freewoman, August 22 1912. Reprinted in D. Nield Chew, ed., Ada Nield Chew, pp. 248-255.

During the years 1907 to 1911, the ideological differences between the women of the League and the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade and Labour Council emerged in public debate over protective and prohibitive legislation. In February 1907, the Home Secretary considered banning barmaids from their employment under the forthcoming Licencing Act. According to the Women's Labour News, the journal of the Women's Trade and Labour Council, over 100,000 women would be put out of work should the Bill become law. They argued that without the vote working-class women had no protection against interference with their right to work.

The truth is, working women will never be safe - they will never have a real weapon to defend them against the whims of any political theorists - until they have the Franchise...As Miss Roper said at the Holborn Town Hall meeting, "Do you think that the Government would consider such proposals for one moment if they had the votes of 100,000 barmaids to reckon with in the next General Election?"¹⁵³

Unfortunately for the Manchester women, many members of both the ILP and the Labour Party were teetotalers who, like Keir Hardie in his days before his conversion to socialism, had believed that alcohol was the major material cause of the depressed condition of the working class.¹⁵⁴

The issue of protection again arose in 1909. In March of that year, Eva Gore-Booth wrote to the Labour Leader, the journal of the Independent Labour Party, explaining why the women florists were asking for an exemption from the Factories and Workshops Act which specified the number of hours which could be worked and the times during which they were allowed to work. She pointed out that should the exemption not be granted, many women would be thrown out of employment and their jobs

¹⁵³ Women's Labour News No. 2. May 1907. GTC 21/21.

¹⁵⁴ Fred Reid, 'Keir Hardie's Conversion to Socialism', in Asa Briggs & John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History. Vol. 2. Macmillan, London 1971. p. 33.

taken by men from France who were able to work after 8p.m.¹⁵⁵ In reply Mary Macarthur stated that:

It may interest your readers to know that the 'protest meeting' was backed by a large number of master florists. Several of them exhibited Bills advertising it, and one enterprising firm, at least, sent two 'bus loads of work-girls from their shop to the meeting place...Miss Eva Gore-Booth apparently finds that the support of employers is easily enlisted in a campaign against protective legislation.¹⁵⁶

The debate continued for several weeks in the pages of the Manchester Guardian, where Mary Macarthur restated her position and that of the League:

I made my protest, in the name of the 170,000 women trade unionists whom I represent, against the association of so great a cause as the Civic Freedom of Women with the present mischievous propaganda against the principle of existing factory legislation to secure which the Women's Trade Union League has toiled for more than a generation, and with which the names of such women as the late Lady Dilke, Mrs. Sidney Webb, Mrs. H.J. Tennant, and Miss Gertrude Tuckwell are so honourably associated...The Women's Trade Union League stands for the extension and development of such protection, and not for its abolition. We shall use our votes, when we get them, to lessen, and not to increase the hours of labour.¹⁵⁷

To which Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth replied:

With regard to the general question of Factory Acts, we go even further than Miss Macarthur; we think that nobody should work for very long hours, and we would gladly see the Acts extended to men, which would entirely do away with the difficulties in their application at present caused by the competition between men and women.¹⁵⁸

Whilst the debate between the two groups apparently concerned whether working women should be left open to exploitation or have their hours of

¹⁵⁵ Labour Leader, March 26 1909. GTC 6/8.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Manchester Guardian July 12 1909. GTC 6/15.

¹⁵⁸ Manchester Guardian July 14 1909. GTC 6/15.

labour restricted by law, the Labour Leader went to the heart of the matter by stating:

There are the interests, too, of the wives and mothers of working-class homes to be considered. Every time a woman obtains work which a man could do by cheapening its price, she also strikes at the home comfort of his wife and children. But the middle-class woman of the "Abstract Liberty" school would seem to care for none of these things. We confess that our sympathies are wholly with Miss Macarthur in this controversy.¹⁵⁹

It was through statements such as these that the labour movement affirmed its belief in maintaining the sexual division of labour both within the workforce and within the home. As Ramsay MacDonald said:

The proposition is growing in my mind that the Socialist movement and the Labour movement generally should make it quite clear that the social unit that has got to be protected is not the individual man and the individual woman, but the family...the Labour movement upon its women's and domestic side is not going to have its programme made up for it by a few very worthy and very excellent women who are still in a stage of revolt.

And he stressed his belief in 'a system of family economies'.¹⁶⁰

In her analysis of two of the leaders of women's unionism, Julia Varley and Mary Macarthur, Deborah Thom has argued that: 'the organization of women was highly structured by ideological notions of the weakness of women at work and in society at large.' Thus all women workers were perceived as difficult to organise by virtue of their gender, although the same argument was not used for unskilled male workers. As a result, women's unions tended to be led from above, leaving working women with little opportunity to obtain the necessary experience to take over the

¹⁵⁹ Labour Leader March 26 1909 GTC 6/8.

¹⁶⁰ Edinburgh Evening News October 7 1910. GTC 350/32.

running of their own unions.¹⁶¹ In addition, she has written: 'Trade union organization was often argued in general almost sociological terms as if women should take on the wider social burdens as well as their own immediate material needs.'¹⁶² The suggestion that working women were being led from above is certainly present in the annual reports of the League where they are constantly referred to as girls and Mary Macarthur's statements on the role of trade unionism for women seems to confirm this. In 1909 Macarthur wrote:

The only hope for the helpless isolated woman worker to-day, often labouring beyond her strength for pitiful wages, is that she should cease to be helpless and isolated and unite with her fellow toilers. A Trade Union is like a bundle of sticks tied firmly together so that it cannot easily be broken...Sometimes a few of the most sensible and wide-awake women in a factory decide to join the Union, but the more thoughtless and selfish stand aloof. These say, "Oh, we don't need to join; we'll get any benefits you get." These are the girls who make organisers and angels weep.¹⁶³

And, as Thom has argued, Macarthur placed special emphasis upon women's role as trade unionists for the future of the nation:

Every worker must strive with whole heart to lift Labour to a place where insult, hunger, and ill-treatment cannot follow; and women, whose hearts are compassionate beyond those of men, must strive especially hard...Let each girl, then, for her own sake, for the sake of her work-mates, and above all, for the sake of the little children, take her place in the organised Labour movement, and thus help to usher in a brighter day.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ D. Thom, 'The Bundle of Sticks: Women, Trade Unionists and Collective Organization before 1918', pp. 263, 264 & 284.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p. 276.

¹⁶³ Mary Macarthur, 'The Women's Trade Union League'. Women Workers. A Souvenir of Women's Labour Day. July 17th 1909. p. 12. Archives of the British Labour Party. Pamphlets and Leaflets 1900-1926. Series 2, Part 1. 09/24.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 13.

To say this, however, is not to diminish the work of either the League or the NFWW. From 1903 the League operated a Legal Advice Department, run by Sophy Sanger, which primarily gave advice and represented workers in compensation claims for injuries received at work.¹⁶⁵ In addition, the annual reports regularly carried a complaints section which exposed illegal working conditions. From 1906 the League was prominent in the Anti-Sweating League which was eventually to lead to the establishment of the first Trade Boards in 1910, in the tailoring, paper box making, machine-made lace and the hammered and dollied or tommied chain making industries.¹⁶⁶ Members of the League and the Federation sat on these Boards as workers' representatives. The object of the Trade Boards was to establish a minimum wage in the industries they covered. For many years also, the League campaigned against the use of lead in the pottery industry. Ada Nield Chew spent many years regularly visiting the victims of lead poisoning in their homes and reported back to the League which used the Potteries Fund to provide assistance for convalescence, medicines, food and clothing.¹⁶⁷

Despite this valuable work, it was the issue of representation, above all else, which prompted the split in the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council in 1904 and which, as Thom has argued, possibly retarded the growth of women's unionism.¹⁶⁸ The women unionists involved argued that: 'They were convinced that the time had come when it was essential for the

¹⁶⁵ Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union League, January 1904, pp. 14-15. *History of Women* 250.

¹⁶⁶ Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Women's Trade Union League, January 1910, pp. 12-13. *History of Women* 250.

¹⁶⁷ The Potteries Fund was established in 1898 and was still in existence on the eve of the First World War. Annual Reports of the League contained information as to the progress of the Fund and the continued use of lead in the industry.

¹⁶⁸ D. Thom, 'The Bundle of Sticks: Women, Trade Unionists and Collective Organization before 1918', p. 262.

unions' progress and future development that they should stand on an independent and self-reliant basis and formulate their own policy.'¹⁶⁹ And Sarah Dickenson posed the question: 'Is it right that the representation intended for the organised working women shall remain in the hands of the Women's Trade Union Council, at present an unrepresentative body of self-elected people?'¹⁷⁰ The Manchester and Salford Women's Trade and Labour Council cannot be considered representative of women's trade union organisation generally. Admittedly it drew its support from the largest group of organised women in the country, the cotton workers, but they were atypical of women workers as a whole both in terms of organisation and wages. However, it was this atypicality in their long tradition of women working, which gave them the ability to speak out publicly and thus create one of the few organisations in the 1900s which was led by working-class women. Just as working-class women twenty years earlier had raised their voices in protest against the imposition of protective legislation on the grounds that it did not take account of the double workload suffered by women so too did these women of the 1900s argue that without the vote, and without active control of their own organisations, the interests of working-class women would not be served.¹⁷¹

For Roper, Gore-Booth and their working-class associates such as Sarah Dickinson, Selina Cooper and Sarah Reddish, their feminism was indivisible from their socialism. The issues which they saw as most concerning

¹⁶⁹ Letter. Manchester Guardian, November 11, 1904. GTC 604/5.

¹⁷⁰ Letter. Manchester Guardian, November 14, 1904. GTC 604/5.

¹⁷¹ For example, Ann Ellis, who had been one of few working-class women leaders of the early unions organised by the Women's Protective and Provident League, became involved in the campaign for the suffrage for working-class women which led to the women's textile workers' deputation to Westminster in 1901 and the presentation of a petition signed by almost thirty thousand women workers. See J. Bornat, 'Lost Leaders: Women, Trade Unionism and the case of the General Union of Textile Workers, 1875-1914', in A. V. John, ed., Unequal Opportunities p. 214. Working class women and the vote is the subject of the following chapter.

working women – the right to economic independence and the right to vote – were fundamental tenets of a socialist feminism which viewed the family and the workplace as the sites where oppressive relations were constructed and enacted. They therefore acknowledged no fundamental division between the fight for women's rights and the struggle for a new society, and criticised the Labour Party on the basis that it regarded these issues as distinct:

a labour man is different. He is sent to Parliament by the efforts of the working people, simply because they believe that through political activity they can add to their industrial value. For him to turn round and tell us that wages are fixed by economic causes only, and to explain how the world is made in watertight compartments, is simply exasperating...The question is gradually shaping itself before them: Are they going to remain Labour representatives, people who are outside the intrigue and dishonest dealing of the traditional parties, the working people's protest and attempt at real representation of a simple, forcible kind; or are they going to settle down in politics, having sown their wild oats, and take their places as loyal members of a third party whose object is to keep up its importance, hold its own in the political world, and provide careers for its young men?¹⁷²

The opposition to the compartmentalisation of issues, as expressed by the breakaway Manchester women, illustrated the complex nature of the 'common sense' embodied in gendered ideology and the accompanying difficulties encountered in attempts to challenge that 'common sense'. The Women's Trade Union League had initially attempted just such a challenge by denying the negative portrayal of womanhood expressed by the male union movement and by asserting that women could prove their strength by forming their own independent unions. When this policy failed to produce a strong women's union movement, as it was bound to do given the nature of women's work and the League's initial London bias, the League sought an alliance with the male unions which resulted in a re-definition of women

¹⁷² Women's Labour News No. 2, May 1907. GTC 21/21.

workers as weak and in need of protection. This shift in emphasis culminated in 1921 with the disappearance of both the League and the National Federation of Women Workers. The League's commitment – personally, emotionally and politically – to the labour movement¹⁷³ was to act as an important inhibiting factor in its attempts to challenge the 'common sense' of that movement; or, to put it in the words of Gertrude Tuckwell, the disappearance of feminism in the League led to a corresponding stress upon the feminine represented within gendered ideology.

The women from Manchester appeared to replicate the earlier position of the League in its opposition to protective legislation. However, the critical difference here lay in the fact that this later opposition came from working-class women. Like the League, again, they also appeared to be asserting women's equality through an independent organisation. But the lives of working-class women, as both women *and* as members of the working class, transcended the ideological division within the feminist and socialist problematics. Their marginal position within the labour movement resulted not solely from their assertion of women's rights, when class was considered the dominant form of organisation, but because they simultaneously challenged the dichotomous view implicit in hegemonic gendered ideology whilst organising on the basis of class. Their belief in the need for a change of consciousness within the working class itself, informed by the works of Morris and Carpenter, challenged the compartmentalisation within the labour movement. More than any other issue, the struggle for the vote among working-class women exemplified this simultaneous struggle and it is to this that we shall now turn.

¹⁷³ Mary Macarthur, for example, was married to W. C. Anderson who was chairman of the ILP from 1910–1913..

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN AND THE SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN TO 1914

The campaign for women's suffrage in England has entered popular imagination, stirred by the images of women chained to railings, throwing stones through windows and engaging in battles with the police. Academic and popular texts have, until recently, tended to fuel this image by concentrating upon the 'militant' activities of the Women's Social and Political Union and, specifically, upon its leaders Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.¹ There is no doubt that some of their endeavours were ingenious, daring and amusing,² but in the process the dimensions of the struggle have been diminished. More recently, however, a number of historians have sought to restore the lost dimensions of the struggle using a variety of quite different approaches but sharing nonetheless a common belief that the struggle for women's enfranchisement needs to be seen in a wider context than simply the desire to obtain the vote.

Thus Susan Kingsley Kent has stated that suffragists 'set out to redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture of Britain'.³ Using a Foucauldian analysis, Kent argues that suffragists sought sexual autonomy by challenging contemporary definitions of female sexuality utilising 'reverse discourses'. That is, they utilised the language and categories of the dominant sexual discourse, developed pre-eminently by medical

¹ See especially, Andrew Rosen, Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903-1914 Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1974. Antonia Raeburn, The Militant Suffragettes Michael Joseph, London 1973. David Mitchell, The Fighting Pankhursts Jonathan Cape, London 1967. David Mitchell, Queen Christabel McDonald & Jane's, London 1977.

² To give just one example of the ingenuity of the suffragists. In 1909, Muriel Matters, an Australian, flew over the House of Commons in an airship decorated with the words 'Votes for Women', hailing the Members through a megaphone.

³ Susan Kingsley Kent, Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914 Routledge, London 1990. p. 3.

authorities, in order to resist that very discourse.⁴ Like the work of Philippa Levine,⁵ which has already been discussed, Kent sees the struggle for the vote as part of a wider struggle for women's autonomy; and both these historians stress women's agency in actively resisting contemporary definitions of womanhood.

There is ample evidence from the suffragist campaigners themselves to support this view. In 1938, for example, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence recalled in her autobiography the significance the campaign for enfranchisement had for women.

[T]hough the movement meant much to the public life of the country, to us who were personally involved it was fraught with deeper issues. It meant to women the discovery of their own identity, that source within of purpose, power and will, the real person that often remains throughout a lifetime hidden under the mask of appearance. It also meant to women the discovery of the wealth of spiritual sympathy, loyalty and affection that could be formed in intercourse and friendship and companionship with one another. Gone was the age old sense of inferiority, gone the intolerable weight of helplessness in the face of material oppression, gone the necessity of conforming to conventional standards of behaviour, gone all fears of Mrs. Grundy. And taking the place of the old inhibitions was the release of powers that we had never dreamed of. While working for the idea of political liberty we were individually achieving liberty of a far more real and vital nature.⁶

Pethick Lawrence, socialist and one-time member of the Women's Social and Political Union,⁷ wrote these words just ten years after the vote had been

⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵ Philippa Levine, Victorian Feminism 1850-1900, Hutchinson, London 1987.

⁶ Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, My Part in a Changing World, Gollancz, London 1938. pp. 214-215.

⁷ Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, 1867-1954, began her public career as a worker for the West London Mission, during which time she helped to found a club for working girls. She was the treasurer of the Women's Social and Political Union from 1906-1912 and joint editor of the suffrage journal Votes For Women from 1907-1914. See her entry in Jennifer S. Uglow, ed., The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography, Macmillan, London 1984. pp. 370-371.

granted to all women over the age of twenty-one in 1928. Although Pethick Lawrence herself was associated primarily with one suffrage group, her description of the profound spiritual effect the campaign had upon women activists had a resonance for all women involved regardless of their political affiliations.⁸ Indeed, the campaign for women's suffrage was interpreted by supporters and opponents alike as meaning far more in both spiritual and material terms than formal political equality with men because of the impact it was believed it would have on women and their role within society.⁹ As Violet M. Shillington, of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), argued in relation to working women:

The granting of votes to women will not suddenly make their industrial position an ideal one, but it will give them a valuable and much-needed means of protection. Moreover, by raising the whole standard of life and outlook of the woman wage-earner, and giving her the moral support of self-respecting and responsible citizenship, the value of the vote cannot be over-estimated. The good which a vote will do for her in the long run is practically inestimable.¹⁰

In ^{his} ~~her~~ assessment of the ideas of the suffrage movement Les Garner shares the belief that: 'The vote, or the lack of it, was symbolic of women's oppression and inequality'.¹¹ Why otherwise, ~~she~~ he asks, would women have subjected themselves as they did to physical and verbal abuse? But in some very important respects Garner's work modifies that presented by Kent and

⁸ For an analysis of the impact of spiritualism upon the suffrage campaign and its connection with the physical sacrifice of militant suffragists see Martha Vicinus, Independent Women. Work and Community For Single Women 1850-1920, Virago, London 1985. pp. 247-280.

⁹ For a discussion of the ideas of those opposed to women's enfranchisement see Brian Harrison, Separate Spheres. The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain, Croom Helm, London 1978.

¹⁰ Violet M. Shillington, Women Wage-Earners and The Vote, NUWSS, London n.d. [c. 1908]. GTC 604/67-74.

¹¹ Les Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty. Feminist Ideas In The Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918, Heinemann, London 1984. p. 105.

Levine. In the first instance, Garner does not view the suffrage movement as ideologically homogeneous but, rather, as 'fluid and eclectic', part of a continuing debate.¹² In addition, despite or perhaps because of the symbolism attached to the vote, ~~she~~ reaches the conclusion that although the movement was an important stepping stone to women's liberation, the campaign for the vote 'may have diverted them [feminists] from a wider vision of emancipation'.¹³ Importantly, Garner argues that the issue of class represented a dividing factor among suffragists - not in terms of the class affiliations of suffragists, although this was sometimes a factor - but in terms of analysis. Thus, whilst the NUWSS and the smaller Women's Freedom League, a breakaway group from the WSPU, gave greater emphasis upon the wider meaning of the vote for working-class women, the militant tactics and undemocratic structure of the WSPU, by contrast, precluded the development of a concomitant militant ideology to the extent that 'it refused to question class differences or to see emancipation other than in terms of gaining the vote'.¹⁴

Sandra Holton's work on 'democratic suffragism' extends some of the insights offered by Garner, with particular stress laid upon the work of the NUWSS and its relationship to the Labour Party. In the process, Holton places the suffrage campaign at the centre of political life in Britain in the years immediately before the outbreak of war in 1914. Suffrage

¹² Ibid. p. vii.

¹³ Ibid. p. 115. This is a somewhat controversial point in the light of the evidence from suffragists themselves and with regard to more recent scholarship. In her assessment of the suffrage campaign in America, for example, Ellen Carol DuBois suggests that suffragism, as a movement of women, represented both a transformation of consciousness and a deepening sense of women's collective power. Feminism and Suffrage. The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848-1869, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1978. pp. 15-19.

¹⁴ L. Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty Chapters 2 & 3 & p. 59.

campaigning, she argues, was one important factor behind the shift of progressive opinion from Liberal to Labour affiliation.¹⁵

These quite diverse approaches to the suffrage campaign demonstrate above all else the complex nature of that campaign. The value of Kent's work lies, I believe, not so much in her emphasis upon sexuality as the unifying factor of the campaign - which is open to debate - but, rather, upon her use of discourse theory. This alerts us to the possibility that when women articulated the language of difference to justify entry into the political world they may have done so for the express purpose of exposing the biological determinism which lay at the heart of women's exclusion from political participation. Thus, the use of the language of difference by suffragists did not necessarily mean that they therefore also accepted the biologicistic implications of that language. Levine's suggestion that suffragism was one part of a multi-pronged feminist attack upon women's oppression in Victorian England, rather than an isolated campaign conducted by and on behalf of middle-class Liberal women alone, raises the interesting point that a notion of woman-centredness cut across traditional political boundaries and led to the belief that women formed a distinct and separate grouping within society.¹⁶ Levine's analysis stops at 1900 but it would certainly appear to have some application for the cross-class appeal of the NUWSS, in particular, after the turn of the century.

Yet to define the suffrage movement entirely in terms of either woman-centredness or sexuality is, I believe, to underplay the tensions that existed within feminism and its relationship to other social and political movements of the period. Suffragists were campaigning at a time when the two most crucial divisions within society were those of gender and class.

¹⁵ Sandra Stanley Holton, Feminism and Democracy. Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986. pp. 5-7.

¹⁶ P. Levine, Victorian Feminism 1850-1900 pp. 13-19.

What is missing from the accounts of both Kent and Levine is an understanding of class and, importantly, of the gendered nature of class itself. By contrast, Garner's work on the ideas of suffragism shows a greater diversity of opinion over the meaning of the vote, particularly when linked to a class analysis. Holton's work has a different purpose, which is to identify a cross-class democratic impulse within suffragism. Nevertheless, her work too reveals that it was the linking of suffragism to a broader class analysis which proved to be more effective in the winning of the vote than militant tactics and, moreover, played a significant part in the realignment of party politics.

What emerges, then, from these recent interpretations is an understanding of the suffrage movement as both an active attempt to redefine contemporary definitions of womanhood and an attempt to locate that redefinition at the centre of political life, particularly after 1906 when the Liberal Government was passing social and economic reforms in which women felt they had an especial interest. Therefore as well as being important for the elucidation of notions of womanhood, the women's suffrage campaign is also critical for an understanding of the general relationship between feminism and socialism, which is the focus of this chapter, particularly following the emergence of the Labour Party as a political force after 1906.

There are several reasons why the suffrage campaign had a specific relevance for socialist groups. First, historically the universal suffrage demand was the most systematic and sustained demand of both socialists and feminists dating back to the period of the Owenite and Chartist

movements of the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁷ Secondly, during the period up to 1914, the campaign for women's suffrage was conducted without cessation; a period which also coincided with the rapid growth of socialism in England. Thus there existed at one and the same time two powerful movements which were both concerned with political, social and economic change. Thirdly, the women's suffrage movement may be regarded as the 'river of fire', the testing ground for all socialists, as women's suffrage constituted the most concrete demand of feminists and, given the history of the extension of the franchise to men during the nineteenth century, seemingly the most attainable and justifiable.

However, the relationship between the women's suffrage campaigners and socialism was fraught with difficulties not the least because the existing franchise was determined both by gender and by property.¹⁸ Unlike the issue of protective legislation discussed in the previous chapter, the suffrage campaign was one which affected all women because until 1918 no woman, regardless of her class, could vote in a general election. There was then, in theory at least, the possibility of uniting all women on their common gender basis. In effect, the suffrage movement, on the basis of the demand for the vote, could potentially cut right across the socialist movement with its emphasis upon class solidarity. But the major stumbling block affecting the relationship between feminism and socialism, and which created divisions within both feminism and socialism, was tactical: should the demand be for full adult, or universal, suffrage, which would mean campaigning for men as

¹⁷ In 1825 the Owenite socialists William Thompson and Anna Wheeler produced the Appeal of One-Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery. This work was written as a response to James Mill's 'Article on Government' in 1820 which had stated that the political interests of women were already served by their fathers and husbands.

¹⁸ Qualification for the franchise was, in fact, far more complicated than this simple formulation suggests due to the difficult registration procedures which were not reformed by the Acts of 1884-1885. For a detailed discussion of this point see Neal Blewett, 'The Franchise In The United Kingdom 1885-1918'. Past and Present, No. 32, December 1965. pp. 27-56.

well as women, or for the vote on the same grounds as it had been granted to men, which would mean campaigning for limited enfranchisement.¹⁹ This tactical dilemma was most frequently articulated in both class and party political terms, on the grounds that a limited suffrage for women would enfranchise only those who possessed wealth and property; a move which was interpreted as tantamount to delivering extra votes particularly into the hands of the Conservative Party.²⁰ Further complicating the issue was the fact that the demand for adult suffrage did not necessarily mean a demand for universal suffrage; under franchise legislation in which only males were defined as adult voters this could mean merely the enfranchisement of all men but no women. In addition, the demand for the vote on the same terms as it was or may be granted to men did not thereby necessarily restrict women campaigners to acceptance of a property based franchise.²¹

Bearing in mind the complexities associated with the demand for women's enfranchisement and the accompanying complexities of registration, how, then, can we assess the suffrage campaign with particular reference to socialism. In the light of the recent work on suffragism by feminist historians it is apparent that analysis by political affiliation alone will not suffice. Both Isabella Ford and Emmeline Pankhurst, for example, had been members of the Independent Labour Party virtually since its inception in 1893, yet Ford chose to work within the NUWSS whilst Pankhurst, of course, founded the WSPU. Similarly, even a cursory glance at the various socialist and labour societies reveals significant differences. The Marxist Social

¹⁹ It is important to remember that until 1918 not all adult males were enfranchised.

²⁰ This was one of the arguments used by the Liberals under Asquith to delay the introduction of franchise reform. See David Morgan, Suffragists and Liberals. The Politics of Woman Suffrage in Britain Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1975. p. 72.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of the various debates over adult and women's suffrage see S. Holton. Feminism and Democracy. Chapter 3. pp. 53-75.

Democratic Federation, whose spokesman on this issue was frequently Harry Quelch, as will be discussed in greater detail later, consistently countered women's suffrage motions at Labour Party conferences with adult suffrage amendments. Keir Hardie, of the ILP, on the other hand, was possibly the strongest supporter of the limited measure both within the House of Commons and at ILP and Labour Party conferences. Yet Ramsay MacDonald, the first Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee, remained, at best, ambiguous. Clearly, then, even at this most basic level of analysis, no simple formula existed between political affiliation and attitude towards women's suffrage.

If the suffrage movement cannot be analysed by political affiliation neither can it be analysed by class. The middle-class Labour Party supporters Mary Macarthur and Marion Phillips,²² for example, were convinced adult suffragists, as was the working-class activist Ada Nield Chew.²³ Other middle-class socialists such as Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper supported the more limited measure, as did Selina Cooper who conducted a survey of her home town which appeared to prove that a

²² Marion Phillips, 1881-1932, was born in Melbourne. She moved to London in the early 1900s to study for her Doctorate at the London School of Economics. It was here that she met the Fabians, Beatrice and Sidney Webb and she worked with Beatrice on the Royal Commission into the Poor Law. For a short while she was secretary of the NUWSS but her political life was primarily concerned with the Labour Party. Following the re-organisation of the Labour Party in 1918 Phillips became the first Chief Woman Officer. She became M.P. for Sunderland in 1929. See her entry in Joyce M Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 5. Macmillan, London 1979. pp. 173-179.

²³ Ada Nield Chew later changed her mind in about 1910. See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us pp. 235-236. Ada Nield Chew, 1870-1945, was the eldest daughter of a family of thirteen who farmed in Staffordshire. From 1887 to 1896 she worked firstly in a shop and then in a Crewe tailoring factory. It was in the factory that Chew's sense of injustice was aroused and she contributed an anonymous series of articles to the Crewe Chronicle on working conditions in the factory. These articles brought her into contact with her local branch of the Independent Labour Party, which she joined in 1894. From 1900-1908 she was an organiser for the Women's Trade Union League but her time from 1911 onwards was devoted to the suffrage campaign as a member of the NUWSS. Like so many of her socialist feminist contemporaries, she became a pacifist during the war and joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. See her entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 5. Macmillan, London 1979. pp. 57-64.

majority of working-class women would be enfranchised if they were granted the vote on the same terms as it was given to men.²⁴

Kent and Levine's stress upon women's autonomy and Garner and Holton's identification of a broader democratic current within, pre-eminently, the NUWSS and the WFL, which led to a close relationship with the Labour Party after 1912, alert us to the fact that independence - or autonomy - and alliance lay at the heart of the suffrage campaign. Furthermore, Kent's use of Foucauldian discourse analysis when applied to the language of suffragists also shows that the related problematic of difference and equality was a critical element in suffrage ideology. The issues which will be raised in this chapter, therefore, concern the extent to which the suffragists sought to challenge and thereby re-define accepted notions of womanhood. Socialist reactions to this challenge are discussed in the context of the differences between the various socialisms which were in existence at this time and in relation to the political context in which suffragism asserted itself. By these means I hope to reach an understanding of the gender antagonism which was unquestionably evident within sections of the socialist movement. Thus a related issue will be to elucidate the impact that a gendered nature of class had upon both feminists and socialists.

This chapter does not purport to present a detailed history of the suffrage movement; space alone does not permit such an examination nor is that the intention of this work. As has been the case in earlier chapters, I have selected statements made by suffragists and socialists which illuminate their views on womanhood and which clarify their position with regard to the differing strands of feminism and socialism in existence at that time. Moreover, I have chosen to concentrate primarily upon the WSPU because to

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of this and other surveys which were conducted in 1904, and the debate surrounding their validity, see Jill Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel. Selina Cooper 1864-1946, Virago, London 1984, pp. 143-145.

date no satisfactory study has been conducted which explains why a group of socialist women should have become increasingly hostile to both the ILP and the Labour Party. The purpose of this approach is to obtain a general overview of suffragism and socialism. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that in adopting such an approach it is possible that the sheer diversity of the suffrage movement will be lost to view. To date, only one detailed work on suffragism at a local level has been produced and the evidence presented there by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris completely alters our perception of the suffrage movement as London-based and controlled by the well-known national figures of the Pankhursts and Millicent Garrett Fawcett.²⁵

The period under consideration for this chapter opened with the last hopeful attempt by the suffragists of the nineteenth century to achieve some limited measure of women's suffrage under Gladstone's Reform Bill of 1884. Despite considerable support for their proposal, Gladstone, a notorious opponent of women's suffrage, invoked the principle of party loyalty at the division and the Women's Suffrage Amendment was defeated by 271 votes to 135.²⁶ The passing of the Corrupt Practices Act of the previous year had given women hope that their amendment would succeed for it foreshadowed what promised to be enormous changes in the political parties.²⁷ As a result of this Act, both the Conservative and Liberal parties established women's sections; the Primrose League and the Women's Liberal

²⁵ Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us. The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement. Virago, London 1978.

²⁶ Figures cited in Ray Strachey, The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain (1928) Virago, London 1978. p. 278.

²⁷ The Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 was designed to abolish the bribery of voters which so characterised general elections. This, in turn, led the two political parties to seek a more organised approach to electioneering through the establishment of constituency organisations. At the same time, this reform abolished one of the major arguments against the enfranchisement of women; namely, that elections were too rough occasions for women to participate.

Federation respectively. However, despite the establishment of these groups, the Act did not lead immediately to any great changes in the political scene for women as their role was not seen as political in the sense of direct engagement in party politics, rather they were to become auxiliary associations designed for fund-raising and other 'subsidiary' activities.

The suffrage movement was to suffer a further blow in 1889 when, in June and August of that year, the Nineteenth Century journal published two articles protesting against the movement for the enfranchisement of women which were signed by many prominent women of the times, including Beatrice Webb.²⁸ The thrust of the opposition's arguments revolved around the nature of womanhood. As Louise Creighton²⁹ wrote:

The power of woman's influence cannot be measured. When I speak of influence, I do not mean a conscious definite desire to guide another in some particular direction, but the effect produced upon man by a nature which he believes to be purer, nobler, more unselfish than his own. Sex is a fact – no Act of Parliament can eliminate it – and woman, as woman, must be a power for good or evil over man. In her hands rests the keeping of a pure tone in society, of a high standard of morality, of a lofty devotion to duty in public life. She is often not alive to her

28 The two articles were; 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage'. The Nineteenth Century, No. 148, June 1889 and 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Rejoinder'. The Nineteenth Century, No. 150, August 1889. In her autobiography Webb stated that: 'Why I was at that time anti-feminist in feeling is easy to explain, though impossible to justify. Conservative by temperament, and anti-democratic through social environment, I had reacted against my Father's over-valuation of women relatively to men; and the narrow outlook and exasperated tone of some of the pioneers of women's suffrage had intensified this reaction.' Beatrice Webb, My Apprenticeship, Vol. 2, Pelican, London 1938. pp. 401-402. Both Webb and Louise Creighton later publicly withdrew their opposition to women's suffrage in 1906. See Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Vol. 3, 1905-1924, Virago, London 1984. pp. 57-58. See also Barbara Caine, 'Beatrice Webb and the "Woman Question"'. History Workshop Journal, Issue 14, Autumn 1982. pp. 23-43.

29 Louise Creighton was married to Dr. Mandell Creighton, the Bishop of London. She was involved in the campaign for the establishment of a hall of residence for women at Oxford University. She was a founder member of the National Union of Working Women in 1895. See Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Vol. 2, Virago, London 1983. p. 82.

power, and if her power became conscious it would lose much of its potency.³⁰

Creighton's arguments against the enfranchisement of women echoed those written by John Ruskin a quarter of a century earlier.³¹ Her analysis illustrates how the religious language of gender difference, as articulated by the Evangelicals, had passed into secular usage. What had originally been stressed as the immutable law of God, which was beyond the realm of 'man' to alter, was re-stated in secular terms as biological determinism – a natural law which was in its own way every bit as immutable as that ordained by God. Thus Creighton could argue that:

If she is to remain a woman, if she is to use the power of her sex in political conflict, she will debase her sex and lower the ideal of womanhood amongst men. It is given to her to make or mar a man's life; she may not care for the power – she may wish she did not possess it; but she cannot escape from its responsibilities. Would not the wise course be, to try to make herself such a woman that her influence may lift all those with whom she comes in contact?³²

The contradictions within this mode of thought are clearly evident. Woman was portrayed as the morally stronger sex, yet it was a precarious strength only which would immediately dissipate once it came into contact with the 'public' world. She was at one and the same time the source of all moral goodness and the potential source of moral contamination. One means of reconciling this contradiction was to emphasise the 'natural' separation of spheres between the sexes. Thus women's moral power over men was expressed not in terms of active choice but in terms of an unconscious, innate component of the feminine spirit. To be a woman and a force for moral good were therefore coterminous. This moral purity, however, could

³⁰ Louise Creighton, 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Rejoinder'. p. 354.

³¹ See John Ruskin's essay 'Of Queen's Gardens'. Sesame and Lilies & The Political Economy of Art. (1865) Collins, London n.d. pp. 95-158.

³² L. Creighton, 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Rejoinder'. p. 354.

be maintained only by the recognition of and compliance with the ideology of separate spheres for women and men.

Yet the fact that gendered ideology was contradictory points to the unstable character of that ideology. It was neither predetermined nor unchanging and this very fluidity allowed women to mobilise the same arguments in support of the case for women's suffrage. For if women were the moral guardians of the nation, what could be more vital than the effect of their influence being brought directly to bear upon that institution, the 'Mother of Parliaments'? As Millicent Garrett Fawcett³³ wrote in response to the anti-suffragists:

If women are fit to advise, convince, and to persuade voters on how to vote, they are surely also fit to vote themselves. On the other hand, if it is true, as the Nineteenth Century ladies state, that women on the whole 'are without the materials for forming a sound judgment' on matters of constitutional change, why are we invited by those same ladies to form our unsound judgments, and do all in our power to induce others to share them? We do not want women to be bad imitators of men; we neither deny nor minimise the differences between men and women. The claim of women to representation depends to a large extent on those differences. Women bring something to the service of the state different from that which can be brought by men.³⁴

She was joined in her reply by Mrs. Ashton Dilke,³⁵ who used the moral argument of the anti-suffragists as the precise reason why women should be enfranchised.

³³ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 1847-1929, was the younger sister of the pioneer doctor Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. From 1867 onwards she became involved in both the campaign for women's suffrage and married women's property rights. In 1897 she became president of the NUWSS. During the First World War her support for the war effort provoked a split within the ranks of the NUWSS. See her entry in Jennifer S. Uglow, ed., The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography. Macmillan, London 1984. p. 171.

³⁴ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Reply I'. The Nineteenth Century. No. 149, July 1889. pp. 90-96.

³⁵ She was the sister-in-law of Lady Dilke of the Women's Trade Union League.

We cannot afford as a nation to allow such a potent moral influence as that of women to lie fallow. It is very well to call it a reserve force, but a reserve force that is never to be put into action is of small practicable value. We think the time has come when that moral influence must be both organised and put into action.³⁶

The key element on both sides of the suffrage debate was that of difference. The moral superiority of women formed the bedrock of gender difference and was not, therefore, the subject of dispute. It was over the interpretation of that moral influence that debate arose. It was precisely this form of indeterminate reasoning which John Stuart Mill had sought to banish from the debates on woman. However, by the last third of the nineteenth century, as the above statements illustrate, the language of moralism had become entrenched within those debates. Moreover, those debates also constituted an important component of hegemonic liberal ideology. The proclamation of a universal feminine nature by both suffragists and anti-suffragists purported to speak for all and, indeed, framed part of the common sense of social existence. But this universality rested upon a divided social and cultural viewpoint which allowed only men the rationality and individualism which lay at the heart of liberal ideology. Thus the nature of woman was grounded in an essential division between reason and passion. The complex inheritance of feminism cohered around this dualism, restated in terms of equality with men (rational) or different from men (moral).

Consciousness of women's subjectivity was problematic for this very reason. Current ideas formed the framework of the debate with neither side disagreeing over the essential nature of woman but over how, and in what areas that nature should seek expression; was it to be reserved purely for the home or did it have a wider social and political applicability? Thus, the

³⁶ M. M. Dilke, 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Reply 11'. The Nineteenth Century. No. 149, July 1889. pp. 101-102.

fragile character of gendered ideology provided both the chains that bound women and the potential for liberation. As Mrs. Dilke said, the supporters of women's suffrage 'wish women to vote because they are different from men, and because no alteration of laws, or customs, or social habits will make them the same as men'.³⁷ Neither side of the suffrage debate, at this point in the 1880s, sought to challenge the *status quo* in terms of an alteration in the institutions which constituted the framework of society. But the demand for women's suffrage itself necessarily represented a challenge to that *status quo*. As Sandra Holton has written: 'To accept gender differentiation as naturally given was not...necessarily to accede to the hierarchical ordering of the sexes on the basis of that differentiation.'³⁸ The demand for the vote was therefore also the demand that women be treated as both fully human and as individuals in contradistinction to liberal Enlightenment tradition whereby men were accorded individualism but women were universalised as 'woman'.³⁹

The problematic nature of the demand for women's suffrage was pervasive throughout the suffrage debates at this time. Some suffragists for example, argued against the granting of votes to married women on the grounds that, given the structure of the family, it would be equivalent to granting husbands two votes.⁴⁰ Although this view would appear to contradict the case put forward for women's suffrage, based as it was on a conviction of women's moral superiority and influence over men, in reality

³⁷ M. M. Dilke, 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage: A Reply II'. p. 98.

³⁸ S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*. p. 13.

³⁹ See Tricia Davis, Martin Durham, Catherine Hall, Mary Langan & David Sutton, "'The Public Face of Feminism': Early Twentieth-Century Writings on Women's Suffrage', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz & David Sutton, eds., *Making Histories. Studies in History-Writing and Politics* Hutchinson, London 1982. p. 309.

⁴⁰ Lydia Becker, the first secretary of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, which later became the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage, was an advocate of this idea. See A. Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* pp. 7-8.

it was entirely consistent with the view that the family, and the man as the head of the family, constituted the primary social unit in society and that women's position of moral superiority within the family rested upon a position of actual inferiority with regard to men. It will be argued later that this argument could be used by both pro and anti-suffragists for this was one of the arguments put forward by some socialists who were opposed to the demand for women's enfranchisement.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, then, these were the parameters of the debate on the suffrage, hitherto a debate which had been conducted by and on behalf of middle-class women, and one which appeared to accept an androcentric definition of womanhood on both sides of the debate. The argument over what constituted womanhood; her morality and her sphere of influence, was a dominant theme throughout the whole of the suffrage agitation, and if at times it appeared to be submerged by other themes, it was nonetheless all-pervasive. Towards the end of the century, however, the voices raised in favour of women's enfranchisement were joined by a completely new element in the debate; working and middle-class women socialists.

The defeat of the women's suffrage amendment in Gladstone's Reform Bill in 1884 coincided with the establishment of several socialist organisations in England. By the mid-1890s the two most important socialist groups were the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party each of which included adult suffrage as part of their programmes.⁴¹ Despite this

⁴¹ The context in which the adult suffrage proposal was framed makes it clear that in both these cases it meant universal suffrage. See Programme and Rules of the Social-Democratic Federation, SDF Leaflets and Pamphlets 1883-1931. 1894/2. Report of the First General Conference of the Independent Labour Party, Labour Literature Society, Glasgow 1893, p. 10. BLHE 1880-1900. By the mid-1890s the other socialist society, the Socialist League was virtually moribund, whilst the Fabian Society had relinquished its provincial societies upon the formation of the ILP.

commitment, however, Enid Stacy of the ILP found elements within the party which were antagonistic towards women's rights.

The Labour Party inscribes Adult Suffrage on its political programme; but in the mind of several of its masculine members there is a curious half-defined instinctive antipathy to it – an antipathy often but half conscious of its own entity, which nevertheless eagerly picks up and exhibits any item of news which is supposed to tell against the "New Woman".⁴²

Stacy continued in her article to counter one by one the various arguments against the enfranchisement of women put forward by Robert Blatchford in the pages of the Clarion in a deliberate attempt to provoke debate on the issue. Against the argument that women were intellectually inferior to men she wrote: 'if that is your standard, every voter would have to pass an examination, and before you exclude us you would have to prove that the cleverest woman was more brainless than the most foolish man!' Against the argument that women were by nature conservative and would therefore vote for the Conservative Party she declared: 'Had we the suffrage now, many of us would vote Tory, many of us Liberal, and some, at any rate (I can reckon on one, I think), Socialist. But should our sex herein prove the only offender? I have heard that a working man has occasionally – *very, very* seldom, of course – been known to vote for an employer of labour!' Against the argument that the vote would 'unsex' women because politics was a dirty business she countered: 'Well, now // politics – that manly concern! – is in the distressful state you mention, perhaps a broom wielded by a housewife's hands might brush some of that dust and dirt away, and make the floor of politics suitable for human habitation!'⁴³

The mobilisation of all these arguments against women's suffrage by socialists, Stacy believed, represented elements of the 'half-defined' and

⁴² Enid Stacy, 'Woman's Suffrage'. The Clarion. January 12 1896. Copy courtesy of Angela Tuckett.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

'half conscious' antipathy expressed towards feminism generally within the socialist movement. To put it in the context of this thesis, Stacy's article represented a critique of gendered ideology as espoused by some of the dominant forces within the socialist movement. Stacy's critique was supported by the experiences of Hannah Mitchell,⁴⁴ a working-class socialist and suffrage campaigner who argued that:

No cause can be won between dinner and tea, and most of us who were married had to work with one hand tied behind us, so to speak. Public disapproval could be faced and borne, but domestic unhappiness, the price many of us paid for our opinions and activities, was a very bitter thing.⁴⁵

Similarly Rosalind Nash of the Women's Co-operative Guild found that the most common response among co-operative men towards women's suffrage was: 'My wife? What does she want with meetings? Let her stay at home and wash my moleskin trousers!'⁴⁶ It was to combat these prejudices within the ILP that in 1894 Stacy had called for the formation of separate women's associations.⁴⁷ However, the Women's Branch of the ILP appears to have been a relatively short-lived affair. By 1897, for example, Maude Bruce, the secretary, was writing to London declaring that because

⁴⁴ Hannah Mitchell, 1871-1956, grew up in poverty in Derbyshire. During her life she was a member of the Independent Labour Party, a Poor Law Guardian, a member of the Women's Social and Political Union, and a member of the Women's Freedom League. During the war she too became a pacifist, joining the No Conscription Fellowship and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. As a committed socialist Mitchell worked within the ILP rather than with the Labour Party proper. See her autobiography, The Hard Way Up. Virago, London 1977.

⁴⁵ H. Mitchell, The Hard Way Up, p. 130.

⁴⁶ Rosalind Nash, 'Co-operator and Citizen', in Brougham Villiers, ed., The Case For Women's Suffrage. T. Fisher Unwin, London 1907. p. 76.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Second Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party, 1894. p. 10. BLHE 1880-1900.

membership had dropped to 29 they could not afford to pay their affiliation fees for the month.⁴⁸

Whilst elements within the ILP may have been displaying a certain antagonism towards women, middle-class suffragists, possibly as a result of the development of the 'new unionism' and the formation of the ILP in 1893, took an important step forward in recognising the claims of working-class women to enfranchisement. In June 1893 a meeting was held at the Westminster Town Hall in London which was attended by women suffragists from widely divergent political backgrounds, such as the socialist Isabella Ford and the Liberal Millicent Garrett Fawcett. The result of this meeting was the launching of a special appeal which for the first time specifically included mention of working-class women. Within a year over a quarter of a million signatures in favour of women's suffrage had been collected.⁴⁹ In this context it would appear that David Rubinstein is correct in his assertion that far from being a moribund period in comparison with the militancy of later years, women's suffrage assumed 'an unprecedented importance in the 1890s'.⁵⁰

Two months after the Westminster meeting, Esther Roper was appointed to the position of secretary of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, renamed subsequently the North of England Society for Women's

⁴⁸ Letter from Maude Bruce to ? [possibly Keir Hardie] April 1st, 1897. Archives of the Independent Labour Party. FJC 1897/13. No further correspondence from this group exists beyond 1897 which strongly suggests that it ceased to exist in that year. Interestingly, the women's branch had its headquarters in Glasgow and there appear to be no records of any other branch in ILP archives.

⁴⁹ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, pp. 76-77. See also Marion Ramelson, The Petticoat Rebellion. A Century of Struggle for Women's Rights, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1972. p. 130.

⁵⁰ David Rubinstein, Before the Suffragettes. Women's Emancipation in the 1890s, Harvester Press, Brighton 1986. p. 138 & Chapter 9. Rubinstein is taking issue here with both Andrew Rosen op. cit. & Leslie Parker Hume, The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897-1914, Garland, New York 1982. Rubinstein is supported in his conclusion by Susan Kent, Sex and Suffrage, p. 194.

Suffrage, an affiliated branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, under the leadership of Mrs. Fawcett.⁵¹ In 1900, when Roper's companion, Eva Gore-Booth, became co-secretary with Sarah Dickenson⁵² of the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council, these two organisations provided the focal point of feminist campaigns in the north of England. In the process a vital link was being recognised between the exploitation of women as workers and their oppression as women. While the leaders of the Women's Trade Union League had attributed their growing success in unionising women and their more positive relationship with the trade union movement as a whole to the banishment of feminism from their outlook,⁵³ the women involved in the suffrage and industrial campaigns in the north of England based their claim to political representation upon this explicit connection between gender and class oppression.

The position of the unenfranchised working women, who are by their voteless condition shut out from all political influence, is becoming daily more precarious. They cannot hope to hold their own in industrial matters, where their interests may clash with those of their enfranchised fellow-workers or employers. The one all-absorbing and vital political question for labouring women is to force an entrance into the ranks of responsible citizens, in whose hands lie the solution of the problems which are at present convulsing the industrial world...Remember that political enfranchisement must precede industrial emancipation, and that the political disabilities of women

⁵¹ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, p. 77.

⁵² Sarah Dickenson, 1868-1954, was a weaver from Salford. Her political activities centred around the trade union movement and the suffrage campaign. She was one of a number of working-class women in the Manchester area who linked their oppression as women with their oppression as members of the working class. See her entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 6. Macmillan, London 1982. pp. 101-105.

⁵³ See Gertrude M. Tuckwell, A Short Life of Sir Charles Dilke. Student Bookshops, London 1925. p. 86.

have done incalculable harm, by cheapening their labour and lowering their position in the industrial world.⁵⁴

The above statement formed part of a manifesto issued by the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers' Representation Committee in 1904 and was signed by Selina Cooper, Sarah Dickenson, Eva Gore-Booth, Sarah Reddish⁵⁵ and Esther Roper. This somewhat clumsily titled organisation had been formed in 1903. That same year also saw the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union. Both of these bodies had their bases in Manchester and their origins in the socialist movement. Indeed, the connections between these groups and socialism was made explicit in the title of the Lancashire and Cheshire Committee which reflected that of the Labour Representation Committee formed in 1900. Similarly, according to Sylvia Pankhurst,⁵⁶ the initial title of the Women's Social and Political Union was to have been the Women's Labour Representation Committee and was only changed when the Pankhursts realised that the words 'Representation Committee' had already been adopted by the Lancashire and Cheshire Committee.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Eva Gore-Booth, 'The Women's Suffrage Movement Among Trade Unionists', in B. Villiers, ed., The Case For Women's Suffrage pp. 50-51.

⁵⁵ Sarah Reddish, 1850-1928, was a cotton worker from Bolton. As well as joining with Roper and Gore-Booth in their campaign for women's rights in the Manchester area, Reddish was a life-long member of the Women's Co-operative Guild of which she was president from 1897-1898. See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, p. 291.

⁵⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, 1882-1960, was Emmeline Pankhurst's second child. Like her mother and sister, she was a member of the Women's Social and Political Union. Unlike them, however, Sylvia remained committed to the socialist movement which occasioned a split with the WSPU and the emergence of the East London Federation of Suffragettes in 1914. During the war she was a pacifist and spent her time campaigning for the rights of soldiers' families. She later became a member of the Communist Party. Through her work against fascism in the 1930s she took up the cause of Abyssinia, which had been invaded by Mussolini's forces. See her entry in Jennifer S. Uglow, ed., The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography, Macmillan, London 1984. pp. 358-359.

⁵⁷ Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement (1931). Virago, London 1977. p. 168.

Precisely why the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers' Representation Committee was formed in 1903 is not known. Liddington and Norris have argued that it was related to the rapid growth of the Labour Representation Committee since its formation in 1900, but admit that virtually no records were kept for the first half dozen years of its existence.⁵⁸ Andrew Rosen's study of the formation of the WSPU incidentally hints at some plausible reasons. In 1902 the textile unions became affiliated to the LRC, thereby bringing an increase in membership of over 100,000.⁵⁹ That same year, David Shackleton had been elected as M.P. for Clitheroe in Lancashire and, as Rosen has noted, '18,000 Clitheroe unionists, more than half of whom were women, paid sixpence per member into a special fund for his salary'.⁶⁰ Women trade unionists were thus placed in a highly iniquitous situation. As workers and as trade unionists the women were expected to contribute to the upkeep of an M.P., yet as women they could not vote for him. The only conclusion that could be drawn from such a situation was that the women were discriminated against solely on the basis of their gender. In addition, the question of women's suffrage was not a matter raised at the annual conferences of the LRC until 1904,⁶¹ despite the fact that in 1901 over 29,000 women cotton workers had signed a petition calling for women's suffrage and Shackleton had been approached by the women workers in his constituency to introduce a Private

⁵⁸ J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us p. 163.

⁵⁹ Report of the Third Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee 1903 p. 18.

⁶⁰ A. Rosen, Rise Up Women p. 26.

⁶¹ In 1901, John Penny of the ILP had moved a composite motion which included, among a number of other propositions, adult suffrage. This was passed unanimously by the Conference. See First Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee 1901 pp. 19-20. But this was the only occasion from 1900 to 1904 that the question of the suffrage was mentioned and at no time until 1904 was the specific question of women's suffrage debated. Indeed, what dominated these early conferences was the rather more basic question of getting such disparate groups as the trade unions and the socialist societies to agree as to the objects of the LRC.

Member's bill on that question, which he did not do.⁶² The combination of all these factors must have made the women feel that they would only gain the suffrage through their own efforts.

The reasons for the formation of the WSPU are rather more difficult to discern. Like the key figures in the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers' Representation Committee, the leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union had a long history of involvement in the suffrage campaign. For almost forty years, the Pankhurst name in Manchester had been synonymous with firstly radical, and later, socialist activities, and, more particularly, with the struggle for women's suffrage. In 1868, Richard Pankhurst, a barrister, had argued unsuccessfully for women to be included under the terms of the 1867 Reform Act.⁶³ A year later, however, saw the passing of the Municipal and Corporations Act which included an amendment drafted by Pankhurst that allowed women the vote for the first time in local elections.⁶⁴ In 1895 the Pankhursts joined the Independent Labour Party where Enid Stacy welcomed Mrs. Pankhurst to the ILP 'not only on account of her knowledge and practical experience of the workings of party politics, but also for her many charms of person and manner'.⁶⁵ By 1896 Richard Pankhurst had been elected to the policy making body of the ILP, the National Administrative Council,⁶⁶ and Emmeline Pankhurst achieved notoriety when she joined other members of the ILP in defying the ban

⁶² For a detailed examination of this issue see J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us pp. 144-159.

⁶³ See Emmeline Pankhurst, My Own Story (1914). Virago, London 1979. pp. 11-12, Roger Fulford, Votes For Women. The Story of a Struggle. Faber & Faber, London 1958. pp. 57-58, and S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement pp. 37-45.

⁶⁴ See S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement p. 46.

⁶⁵ Enid Stacy, 'Women's Work and the ILP'. The Labour Annual for 1895 p. 118. Copy courtesy of Angela Tuckett and Ellen Malos.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party. 1896. p. 30. BLHE 1880-1900.

imposed by Manchester City Council on the party meeting at Boggart Hole Clough.⁶⁷ In these years of early involvement with the socialist movement, the Pankhurst family, including their two oldest children Christabel and Sylvia, were to be in constant contact with the most prominent members of the ILP, including Caroline Martyn, Enid Stacy, Katharine Conway, Eleanor Marx, John Bruce Glasier and Keir Hardie.⁶⁸

Between the death of Richard Pankhurst in 1897 and the formation of the WSPU six years later, Mrs. Pankhurst maintained her contact with the ILP, attending with Sylvia their annual conferences and receiving in her home the leaders of the new movement, such as Keir Hardie and John Bruce Glasier. At the same time, Christabel was becoming independently involved with other socialist groups. In her teens she joined the Clarion Cycling Club, a popular mixture of physical recreation and political propaganda initiated by Robert Blatchford in Manchester. She also became friends with Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth and was to join them in their joint struggle for working women's political and industrial rights. Through their influence, Christabel joined not only the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage' executive, an affiliated member of the NUWSS, but also the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council.⁶⁹ This was to be an important influence upon the development of Christabel's socialist feminism because from those two groups she learned of the connections between gender and class oppression.

In their accounts of the formation of the WSPU the three Pankhurst women, Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia, each give quite different reasons as to why it happened. Emmeline Pankhurst stated that it was a visit from

⁶⁷ S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, pp. 136-139. See also The Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Independent Labour Party, 1897, p. 11. BLHE 1880-1900.

⁶⁸ S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, pp. 126-128.

⁶⁹ J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, pp. 170-171.

the American suffragist, Susan B. Anthony, in 1902 which was a contributory factor. According to her mother, Christabel, in particular, had been deeply impressed.⁷⁰ It is indeed possible that this visit was highly significant. In 1890 the National American Woman Suffrage Association had been formed and led by Anthony, among others. According to one historian of the American women's suffrage movement, Anthony 'contended that the vote was the key to women's emancipation'.⁷¹ In her own account, Christabel Pankhurst does not mention the Anthony visit, saying instead that because the labour movement was not concerned with franchise reform she and her mother decided to emulate the growth of independent labour politics by starting an independent women's movement.⁷² Sylvia Pankhurst, by contrast, has argued that it was the decision of the ILP to build Pankhurst Hall as a memorial to Richard Pankhurst which, because it was attached to a social club that excluded women, was the final straw for the family.⁷³ This latter view receives support from Andrew Rosen who has noted the close connection between the opening of Pankhurst Hall on October 3rd, 1903 and the formation of the WSPU on October 10th, 1903.⁷⁴ Clearly, as was the case with the formation of the Lancashire and Cheshire Representation Committee, it was a confluence of events rather than one single factor which contributed to the emergence of the two groups.

⁷⁰ E. Pankhurst, My Own Story p. 37.

⁷¹ Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920. Norton, New York 1981. p. 11. Ellen DuBois, dealing with the earlier period of suffrage campaigning, has shown that Anthony along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton broke away from their connection with abolitionists and had, by 1868, reached the conclusion that 'women's grievances were part of a distinct system of sexual inequality, which had its own roots and required its own solutions'. Feminism and Suffrage p. 174.

⁷² Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled. The Story Of How We Won The Vote. (1959). Cresset, London 1987. pp. 43-44.

⁷³ S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement p. 167.

⁷⁴ A. Rosen, Rise Up Women pp. 29-30.

That these two groups should have arisen in the same city at the same time is explicable by reference to Manchester's long association with suffrage campaigning and to the unusually large concentration of women workers and trade unionists in Lancashire.⁷⁵ But why there were two groups rather than one is harder to elucidate. Some historians have sought refuge in personality seeing the formation of the WSPU as a result of Christabel Pankhurst's 'autocratic' nature.⁷⁶ In view of Christabel's youth – she was only twenty-three at the time – and her relative inexperience such an explanation is difficult to sustain. It is much more likely, as their different titles suggest, that the one group was firmly linked to its regional base whilst the other one conceived of itself from the start as a national organisation. It is possible, too, though somewhat unlikely, as Sylvia Pankhurst suggests, that Emmeline was jealous of her daughter's friendship with Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth and therefore one reason why she formed a separate body was to draw Christabel's attention away from them.⁷⁷ Whatever the reasons, and they must remain speculative given the lack of early records for both organisations, one factor is common to both and that is the women's experience of uninterest and, at times, antagonism by men within the socialist and labour movements to the question of women's suffrage.

Expressions of antagonism towards women and women's suffrage within the socialist movement took various forms, although it needs to be stressed that these differences were frequently obscured by a common emphasis given to class solidarity. Three particular lines of argument against women's suffrage can be discerned within socialism. The first stated that

⁷⁵ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, Chapters IV & V for a detailed analysis of these two points.

⁷⁶ For Christabel's relationship with Roper and Gore-Booth and their organisations see *Ibid.* pp. 170–180.

⁷⁷ S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, pp. 164–168.

the interests of women and men within the working-class were identical and that as long as working-class men were able to achieve political representation women's suffrage was irrelevant. The second argument went further than this and declared that the campaign for women's suffrage was an attempt to divide the working class along gender lines. The third argument was more complex. It did not deny the existence of gender oppression but saw it as the result of economic inequality.

Sylvia Pankhurst encountered the first line of argument when she debated the issue of women's suffrage with John Bruce Glasier, who was one of the more prominent members of the Independent Labour Party:

It was not essential, he argued, that the whole people should be enfranchised. So long as the division were not upon class lines, those outside the suffrage would be represented by those within; their interests would be the same. There was no distinction of interest on sex, but only on class lines. It was not important that women should have the vote; for whilst some people would take an interest in politics, others would specialize in other directions. His opinion, common enough amongst Socialists at the time, was received with bitter resentment.⁷⁸

Glasier's views are significant for both an understanding of why socialist feminists formed independent suffrage organisations and as an insight into the manner in which gendered ideology informed socialist thought. The assumption that women's interests would be served by those already enfranchised – that is, men – appeared to be an argument for the equality of interest between the sexes but it was based upon the belief in a fundamental difference between the sexes because of the statement that it was men, and only men, who were assumed to represent the interests of women as well as themselves. In a similar manner James Mill had disguised his own antipathy towards the question of women's rights in 1820 when he

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 167.

argued that the interests of women and men were identical.⁷⁹ If Glasier's argument was taken literally, then theoretically, given the stress upon class representation, working-class women could just as equally represent the interests of working-class men. The stress upon class, therefore, blurred the implications of gendered ideology within Glasier's thought.

In addition, Glasier appears to have had a personal antipathy towards Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, despite the fact that in 1896 he and Mrs Pankhurst were both involved in the Boggart Hole Clough incident in Manchester.⁸⁰ In 1903, Glasier recorded in his diary:

A weary ordeal of chatter about woman's suffrage from 10 p.m. to 1.30 a.m. – Mrs and Christabel Pankhurst belabouring me as chairman of the party for its neglect of the question. At last get roused and speak with something like scorn of their miserable individualist sexism, and virtually tell them that the ILP will not stir a finger more than it has done for all the woman suffragists in creation. Really the pair are not seeking democratic freedom, but self-importance.⁸¹

The second line of argument was expressed most strongly at LRC conferences from 1905. The first specific reference to women's suffrage was made in 1904 when William Wilkinson, representing the Burnley Weavers, moved a resolution that the franchise should be extended to women 'on the same basis as that allowed to them for parochial purposes'.⁸² He was seconded by Isabella Ford, who also suggested that it was time a woman was on the LRC Executive. The resolution was carried by a large

⁷⁹ James Mill, 'Article on Government'. (1820) Written for the 1824 supplement to the Encyclopedia Britannica. See Richard Pankhurst, Introduction to W. Thompson, Appeal of One-Half The Human Race (1825). Virago, London 1983. pp. ix-x.

⁸⁰ See Laurence Thompson, The Enthusiasts. A Biography of John & Katharine Bruce Glasier. Gollancz, London 1971. pp. 99-101.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 136.

⁸² Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee 1904 p. 47.

majority.⁸³ The following year, J. Husband of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers moved that the LRC endorse the Women's Enfranchisement Bill currently before Parliament as a step towards adult suffrage. Selina Cooper seconded the resolution arguing that although it was a palliative measure so, too, could other measures already supported by the conference, such as unemployment relief and child feeding, be so described. Indeed, she went further and argued that the trade union movement was itself a palliative measure.⁸⁴ In opposing the resolution, Harry Quelch of the SDF-dominated London Trades Council moved an adult suffrage amendment, arguing that: 'Mrs. Cooper has appealed to the sentiment of sex, but he repudiated that there was any sex antagonism. Mrs. Cooper had placed sex first; but it was not the place of the L.R.C. to place sex first; they had to put Labour first in every case.'⁸⁵

Whatever credibility Quelch had as an upholder of the class war and a believer in full adult suffrage must surely have been destroyed when he concluded his speech by launching into a tirade against middle-class women: 'They knew quite as well as he did that the middle-class woman was the worst employer they had. Who was the worst employer of the domestic servant? Who was the worst slave-driver, man or woman?...There was none less charitable, less possessed of the milk of human kindness, none more bitter in the class struggle than the middle class woman.'⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Quelch's amendment, with the assistance of trade union support, was carried by 483 votes to 270. Quelch's denial of sex antagonism rings very hollow in the light of this speech and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion

⁸³ Ibid. pp. 47-48.

⁸⁴ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Labour Representation Committee 1905, p. 55.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 56.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

that his adult suffrage amendments were merely a camouflage for his own antagonistic attitudes towards women.

A more and more sophisticated argument against women's suffrage was expressed by Lily Gair Wilkinson, a member of the Socialist Labour Party, a breakaway group from the Social Democratic Federation based in Scotland.

The feminist movement, like other reform movements, is of direct interest to the bourgeoisie only, and not to the workers. Feminism, in its larger sense, claims equal political and social rights for women as for men *within the framework of the present social system*. Socialism claims that even if this were fully achieved it would be no true emancipation of women. Only those women would benefit who belong to the privileged, or propertied, class in society.⁸⁷

And she continued:

The woman question is but a part of the wider question of social evolution from the earliest times. The basic mistake of the feminists is that they do not recognise this, and therefore cannot trace the true cause of the inequality of the sexes. Sometimes they attribute women's social inferiority to her physical weakness; sometimes to the moral weakness of man. But these differences of the sexes, if they exist at all, are more likely to have arisen as effects of sex-inequality than to be causes thereof. Socialism, on the other hand, does not look for an explanation of social enigmas in any such vague theories. Socialism holds that human society has an essentially *economic base*. Here we have the secret of the origin of all forms of social slavery, the subjection of women among the rest.⁸⁸

Basing her argument upon Frederick Engels' work, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,⁸⁹ Wilkinson believed that working-class women's entry into the labour market had, to some extent, minimised their experiences of gender oppression whilst their experience of wage

⁸⁷ Lily Gair Wilkinson, Revolutionary Socialism and the Woman's Movement. Socialist Labour Party, Glasgow 1909. p. 9. SLTB Part 4 1908-1911 1909/83.

⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 9-10.

⁸⁹ Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. (1884). International Publishers, New York 1972.

slavery had forged common links with working-class men.⁹⁰ She concluded, therefore, that the struggle for women's suffrage, whether in terms of partial or complete enfranchisement, was necessarily reformist because it did not challenge the structure of capitalist society.⁹¹ This form of Marxist analysis was, however, comparatively rare in Britain. It had more in common with the European socialist movements than with those at home.⁹²

As sophisticated as this analysis was, it too, like the more common expressions of class priority to be found within the socialist movement, rested upon a view of class which obscured gender divisions. In the previous chapter we saw how the mid-Victorian reinvigoration of paternalism in industrial relations contributed to the development of a masculinity which was intimately connected with notions of independence and strength through work. As a consequence, what it meant to be a worker – a member of the working class – was itself gendered. Wilkinson's assertion that wage labour minimised women's oppression and, therefore, strengthened class solidarity between women and men, failed to address this issue of the sexual division of labour and gendered notions of class. Understandably, given the context in which she was writing, Wilkinson also failed to address the related question of gendered subjectivity. By not challenging the sexual division of labour, it can be argued, analyses which focused on the economic position of the working class alone also failed to fundamentally challenge the structure of society on all fronts. Therefore the question of consciousness and the related question of subjectivity

⁹⁰ L. Gair Wilkinson, Revolutionary Socialism and the Woman's Movement, p. 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 16–19.

⁹² For a comparison see Richard Evans, The Feminists. Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840–1920, Croom Helm, London 1977, pp. 144–188. See also Philip S. Foner, ed., Clara Zetkin. Selected Writings, International Publishers, New York 1984, pp. 45–50. But, as will be discussed in the following chapter, an understanding of the economic base of women's oppression was increasingly evident within the Fabian Women's Group in particular.

which had been foregrounded in the work of Morris and Carpenter became submerged by the stress upon class.

The arguments against the partial enfranchisement of women put forward by socialists such as Glasier and Quelch, which concerned the priority of class over gender, had two effects upon socialist feminists. Firstly, it placed them in an iniquitous position whereby they became susceptible to the charge of being class traitors by pursuing the 'middle class' objective of a limited suffrage for women.⁹³ This, in turn had the effect of fracturing the feminist movement, dividing socialist women from each other along the lines of adult suffragists against those in favour of a limited measure.

It was to counter the accusation that a limited franchise would only affect women of property that two surveys were conducted in 1904. The first, organised by Keir Hardie on behalf of the ILP,⁹⁴ demonstrated that a large proportion of working-class women would be enfranchised under the terms of the existing Act. Forty ILP branches surveyed 59,920 potential women voters and found that 82.45% of the women who would be enfranchised came under their definition of working class.⁹⁵ The second survey, initiated by the Women's Co-operative Guild⁹⁶ in association with

⁹³ Lily Gair Wilkinson, for example, argued that the surveys conducted by the Women's Co-operative Guild, Selina Cooper and the Independent Labour Party in 1905 which purported to show that if women were enfranchised under the existing franchise qualifications working-class women would form the majority of new voters, were 'a fraud upon the working women'. *Revolutionary Socialism and the Woman's Movement*, p. 18.

⁹⁴ Keir Hardie was a consistent supporter of the suffrage movement but his views on this subject were not the dominant ones within the Independent Labour Party as a whole.

⁹⁵ See S. Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p. 169.

⁹⁶ Although Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the general secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild, became co-secretary of the People's Suffrage Federation, a body committed to adult suffrage, the Women's Co-operative Guild itself avoided a split within its ranks over this issue by arguing that 'while Womanhood (or adult) suffrage is their goal, the guilds leave themselves free to support any measure which would be a step in the direction of this goal'. 'Women Co-Operators and The Franchise.' *Manchester Guardian* December 12 1904. GTC 604/7.

the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers' Representation Committee and the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade and Labour Council, found that in the northern towns they surveyed, which covered areas such as Bolton and Nelson, the proportion was even greater than that found by the ILP survey.⁹⁷ Whilst it is possible to conclude that the surveys were structured in such a way as to fulfil the expectations of their organisers, particularly with regard to the areas surveyed where there was a significantly high proportion of married women workers and the question of what actually constituted a working woman, they simply cannot be dismissed as examples of political manipulation. Both Selina Cooper of Nelson and Sarah Reddish of Bolton were involved in the organising of the survey carried out by the Women's Co-operative Guild, and through their work as Poor Law Guardians and, in the case of Reddish, as an organiser for the WCG, would have had a clear idea of the circumstances of working class women in their own areas. Neither of these surveys, however, had any impact upon the socialist movement and at successive LRC Annual Conferences motions calling for the vote to be granted to women on the same terms as it was granted to men were defeated.⁹⁸

By the 1900s, then, with the introduction of working-class women into the suffrage movement, a significant shift had occurred in suffrage debates from the moral arguments of the 1880s to the debate over class and gender priorities within socialism in the 1900s, which coalesced around limited or adult suffrage. The active involvement of working-class women had precipitated this shift when they linked class and gender oppression with the struggle for the vote. But the attempt to prove that substantial numbers of working women would be enfranchised under the existing electoral

⁹⁷ J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us pp. 180-181.

⁹⁸ The Labour Representation Committee, and the Labour Party as it subsequently became, continued to reject this until 1912 when it committed itself to rejecting any franchise measure which did not include women.

qualifications produced a division between socialist feminists, paralleling a similar division on the question of protective legislation, as this exchange between Eva Gore-Booth and Gertrude Tuckwell revealed. In August 1904, Gertrude Tuckwell⁹⁹ wrote to the Labour Leader, the journal of the ILP, stating that:

I agree with her [Gore-Booth] as to the seriousness of a situation in which women are excluded from the political world, and I agree with her as to the need for the removal of the disabilities of sex and coverture. Am I, however, right in concluding that Miss Gore-Booth is committed to the support of a limited Bill which would have for its object the enfranchisement of women on the same terms as those on which men are at present enfranchised? The result of such a measure of enfranchisement, were it possible to secure it, would not be to enfranchise working women, of whom only the smallest minority would by this means secure a vote, while on the other hand the effect of such a franchise would be politically to considerably strengthen the hands of the upper and middle classes.¹⁰⁰

To which Eva Gore-Booth replied:

Miss Tuckwell thinks it possible to sweep away two electoral disqualifications (sex and property) by one Act of Parliament...It has taken men 100 years, and hard work at that, to get the narrow franchise she is so discontented with; how can we hope to get the whole of that, as well as another enormous extension, including millions of both sexes, embodied and passed and made into law by one sweeping Parliamentary measure? As things are now, manhood suffrage is not a burning question among men as women's suffrage is among all Progressive and Labour women. In view of their low wages and poor industrial conditions, working women cannot afford to wait for a measure of enfranchisement until working men are convinced of the necessity of every man and woman in the country to have a vote,

⁹⁹ Gertrude Tuckwell was a committed adult suffragist. In 1909 the People's Suffrage Federation was formed. Its two honorary secretaries were Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the general secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild, and Mary Macarthur of the Women's Trade Union League and the National Federation of Women Workers. Gertrude Tuckwell was a member of the general committee. As its name suggests, this body was in favour of adult suffrage.

¹⁰⁰ Gertrude Tuckwell, 'Limited v. Adult Women Suffrage'. Labour Leader, August 15 1904. GTC 604/2.

and have quite got rid of the fear of the old bogey of Government by a feminine majority.¹⁰¹

This debate highlighted both the differing conceptions of womanhood within socialism and the related question of class or gender priority. Some socialist women, primarily those whose allegiance lay with the Labour Party, tended to espouse a nominal equality only which effectively accorded with the general acceptance of gendered ideology within the socialist movement. It was, therefore, a notion of equality which had its roots in gender difference. However, those who linked gender and class oppression argued that a socialism framed by and for men could not produce equality between the sexes. This concept of equality rested upon the knowledge that gendered ideology had material effects upon the relationship between the sexes and that, as a result, immediate remedial legislation specifically for women was required. The origins of this debate may be found in the earlier division evident in socialist thought expressed in Owenite socialism and Chartism when visions of a reconstructed society encountered a class-based agitation for male political representation.

Interestingly, Gore-Booth's linking of 'progressive and labour women' lends support to the argument of Sandra Holton that there existed a democratic suffragist current among suffrage campaigners as early as 1904 which reached fruition with the establishment of the Election Fighting Fund by the NUWSS in 1912.¹⁰² Certainly, there were elements among non-socialist suffragists who were making the connection between political and social change and the necessity for women's suffrage. In 1900 the Executive of the NUWSS declared: 'The social order is changing, and the

¹⁰¹ Eva Gore-Booth, 'Woman Suffrage'. Labour Leader, September 9 1904. GTC 604/2.

¹⁰² See S. Holton, Feminism and Democracy, pp. 5-6.

sphere of women's activities is enlarging.'¹⁰³ The remainder of this chapter will be concerned to elucidate these connections with particular reference to the WSPU and, to a lesser extent, the NUWSS and their relationship to the labour movement.

The attitude of some, mainly male socialists to the question of women's suffrage has already been discussed. But if the male critique of this issue, which foregrounded class at the expense of gender, played a key role in the ideological and organisational development of the WSPU, it was mirrored by a feminist critique of socialism which saw the vote not simply as representative of women's oppression in general but also as critical in the debate over the type of socialism which should prevail. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, who joined the WSPU in 1905, was a committed socialist. For her, however, the deep-rooted gender divisions within socialism were revealed by the suffrage campaign, as she wrote later in her autobiography:

I was convinced that all injustice and wrong would come to an end if a system of socialism could supplant the old capitalist regime. I had yet to be awakened to the fact that a system of socialism planned by the male half only of humanity would not touch on some of the worst evils that were engendered by a politically and socially suppressed womanhood.¹⁰⁴

Pethick Lawrence articulated a feeling common to many socialist feminists. It accorded with Christabel Pankhurst's belief that: 'working men show so little desire to give to women the rights which they possess.'¹⁰⁵ In 1914, on the eve of the First World War and after the Labour Party had committed

¹⁰³ Report of the Executive Committee of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Vacher & Sons, London 1900. p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ E. Pethick Lawrence, My Part In A Changing World, p. 146.

¹⁰⁵ Christabel Pankhurst, The Parliamentary Vote For Women, Abel Heywood & Son, Manchester 1905. pp. 15-16. SLTB Part 3, 1903-1907. 1905/61.

itself to supporting a women's suffrage measure, Ellen Wilkinson¹⁰⁶ still argued that: 'the modern woman Socialist...will no longer be content with a general offer of sex equality as her share in the Socialist scheme, because she knows that in a civilisation expressing the masculine view-point that equality would mean worse than nothing in practical life.'¹⁰⁷ Each of these women were led to conclude that male socialists, despite their ardent desire for a new society, would concentrate only upon their own particular grievances and leave untouched those which were specific to women. The origin for this conclusion lay not simply in the attitudes of so many male socialists to women's suffrage, it was brought about also by the manner in which the suffrage campaign became the focal point for debates about women and socialism.

The combination of a distrust of a socialism made by men alone with a feminist perspective which saw the vote as paradigmatic of women's oppression, enabled some socialist women, such as Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, to view the campaign for women's suffrage in metaphysical terms which attempted to transcend the tension between difference and equality. Thus the vote became both the means whereby this tension could be resolved and the symbol of freedom and equality. As Emmeline Pethick Lawrence wrote:

To you who walk in the light of a day that has not yet dawned, VOTES FOR WOMEN means infinitely more than a political battlecry. It means more than the righting of deep human wrongs, more than the safeguarding of women's livelihood, more even than the saving of

¹⁰⁶ Ellen Wilkinson, 1891-1947, became the first woman Labour M.P. in 1924. She came from a family of cotton workers but won a scholarship to Manchester University. Her activities involved her with the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Independent Labour Party and, for a brief period, the Communist Party. In 1935 she became the M.P. for Jarrow and the following year led the hunger marchers to London. See her entry in Jennifer S. Uglow, ed., *The Macmillan Dictionary of Women's Biography*. Macmillan, London 1984. pp. 497-498.

¹⁰⁷ Ellen C. Wilkinson, 'Woman's Share of Socialism'. *The Labour Leader*, July 2 1914. GTC 610/10.

thousands of children from misery and destruction. Yes, these things alone would be enough, and well worth giving our lives for. But the women's movement means more than all these things. It means the coming into the world of new and noble race-ideals; it means the release into the world of a new Soul - the Soul of women hitherto held in subjection and captivity.¹⁰⁸

And she continued with a description of what the women's movement meant to women and, ultimately, to all people.

The Woman's Movement means a new religion, or rather a return of religion to its source - to the sacred Altar of the Hearth; to the Fount of birth and being. It means the beginning of a new morality, especially of that morality between women and men hitherto determined by the immediate convenience and interest of one sex only. It means not only the adjustment of the two halves to each other, but of both to the whole, upon which the health and well-being of the community, body and soul, entirely depends.¹⁰⁹

Pethick Lawrence was not alone in her analysis of the women's movement as a spiritual crusade. Olive Schreiner,¹¹⁰ writing in 1911, not only stressed the moral imperative for the human race of women's liberation, but also the subordination of the individual self to the cause of women.

The profound truth, that the continual development of the human race on earth,...a development which we hope shall make the humanity of a distant future as much higher in intellectual power and wider in social sympathy than the highest human units of our day, as that is higher than the first primeval ancestor who with quivering limbs strove to walk upright and shape his lips to the expression of a word, is possible only if the male and female halves of humanity progress together,

¹⁰⁸ Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, 'What The Vote Means To Those Who Are Fighting The Battle'. Votes For Women, No. 4, January 1908. p. 49.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Olive Schreiner, 1855-1920, was one of the founding members of the Fellowship of the New Life from which emerged the Fabian Society in 1884. The Fellowship, which had as its members men such as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Karl Pearson, provided an early arena for the discussion of female and male sexuality and their relationship to the wider questions of social change. For a discussion of Schreiner's role in the Fellowship and her connections with the socialist and feminist movements see Ruth First & Ann Scott, Olive Schreiner. Andre Deutsch, London 1980.

expanding side by side in the future as they have done in the past – even this truth it is possible few women have exactly and logically grasped as the basis of their action.¹¹¹

And she stated further that:

It is this abiding consciousness of an end to be attained, reaching beyond her personal life and individual interests, which constitutes the religious element of the Woman's Movement of our day, and binds with the common bond of an impersonal enthusiasm into one solid body the women of whatsoever race, class, and nation who are struggling after the readjustment of woman to life.¹¹²

In the writings of Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and Olive Schreiner the feminist and socialist desire for a new society became encapsulated in the women's suffrage campaign, thereby indicating how radical the demand for the vote could be when linked to a fundamental transformation of political and social life. Edward Carpenter's analysis of women and men as alienated from themselves and each other within bourgeois liberal society, an alienation which could be resolved through the agency of 'Urnings' – people who possessed complementary female and male characteristics – was clearly an important influence. So, too, was William Morris with his stress upon consciousness as a key element in revolutionary change. But it was women's suffrage, as a campaign run by women for women, which gave to feminism a heightened consciousness of gender oppression and solidarity. In the process, however, the contradictions between the assertion that both men and women must be transformed from their present condition and the emphasis and status given to the attainment of the vote for women became evident, particularly within elements of the WSPU. Whilst the former assertion stressed human liberation the latter stressed women's liberation.

¹¹¹ Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (1911). Virago, London 1978. pp. 130-131.

¹¹² *Ibid.* p. 128.

It needs to be stressed, however, that these two assertions were not always logically separate in suffrage thought. Pethick Lawrence could argue that: 'Woman must lead the way in making discoveries in the world of human life. Men are not in their natural element here. This is essentially the sphere of women.'¹¹³ Thus, like the suffragists who presented their case for women's enfranchisement in the Nineteenth Century journal in 1889, gender difference was a rationale for enfranchisement. Yet, as her words below indicate, the emphasis upon women was part of a wider emphasis upon human liberation:

It is because they are so essentially different in outlook and thought and life and service that a nation whose Government represents only the outlook and ideals of the male population suffers the same loss as a household that has a father but no mother at its head...Now we are asking and working for the vote because we know that the vote will help the woman's soul to find expression. Because manhood and womanhood are both essential to the human world, they are both essential to human development and human progress, which must come upon political and social lines.¹¹⁴

By describing the suffrage movement as akin to a moral crusade, when accompanied by statements of gender difference, Pethick Lawrence revealed the complex ideological inheritance of both feminism and socialism. The use of religious language owed a debt to socialism but the application of this language in terms of gender difference owed a debt to feminism. As long as the vote was perceived as having a meaning far beyond formal political equality this tension between the desire for a new society whereby both women and men were transformed and the concomitant emphasis upon women alone as an oppressed class could be minimised. Nevertheless, the two elements were fundamentally incompatible, for the 'utopian' dreams of

¹¹³ Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, 'The Nation's Wealth', Votes For Women No. 8, April 30, 1908. p. 121.

¹¹⁴ Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, 'What The Vote Means', Votes For Women No. 1, October 1907. p. 5.

a new world represented a consciousness of how society could be, whereas the use of gendered ideology anchored this feminist analysis within the confines of the *status qua*. Difference and equality – these two sides of the feminist problematic maintained a co-existence within Pethick Lawrence's writing. But because her socialism was located within the visionary tradition of Morris and Carpenter, Pethick Lawrence's feminism ultimately argued for the transformation of both sexes. Pethick Lawrence was, however, only one voice among several in the WSPU and, while she emphasised the far-reaching, transformative power of the vote, a quite different tendency can be observed in the writings of Christabel Pankhurst by which attainment of the vote alone and nothing more became the most important crusade for women.

The dangers of emphasising the vote alone were three-fold. Firstly, by attaching to the vote the symbolic expression of all facets of women's oppression, and to the campaign itself the symbolic expression of all struggles for liberation, the campaign for the vote could become an end in itself and not merely one means to that end. Secondly, because the vote, above all other questions concerning women, was an issue which involved all women it brought about the possibility that men alone would be seen as the enemy and could potentially blur all those other factors that divided women. In effect, the related question of class could disappear. The women involved in the Lancashire and Cheshire Committee fought their campaign for women's suffrage on the basis that it could not be divorced from their simultaneous struggle for women's industrial rights. The Women's Social and Political Union was initially also concerned with this simultaneous struggle. But in 1906 the WSPU moved away from its traditional base in Manchester to London. As a result, it started to lose contact with the very elements in which it had its origin.¹¹⁵ Herein lay the third danger. By

¹¹⁵ For a more detailed description of the effect this move had upon the WSPU in terms of ideology and organisation see J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, pp. 200-209.

subsuming women's oppression under the campaign for the vote, the ideologues within the WSPU, particularly Christabel Pankhurst as we shall see, were potentially alienating many socialist feminist supporters who, for all their criticisms of the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party, felt that the only way those socialist bodies would recognise women's claims was by continued agitation from within. According to Sylvia Pankhurst, for example, Christabel gave as her reason for the split between the WSPU and Sylvia's group the East London Federation of Suffragettes in 1914 as that fact that: 'a working women's movement was of no value: working women were the weakest portion of the sex: how could it be otherwise? Their lives were too hard, their education too meagre to equip them for the contest.'¹¹⁶

The ramifications of the WSPU's move away from its roots can be discerned by the changing statements made by Christabel Pankhurst as the campaign for women's suffrage intensified after the first 'militant' act in

¹¹⁶ S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, p. 517. Similarly, in 1912 Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and her husband Frederick, who had financed the WSPU for many years, left the WSPU ostensibly over the escalation of militancy but in reality because in that year Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst finally severed all links with the Labour Party. See Marion Ramelson, The Petticoat Rebellion, pp. 144-146. The Pethick Lawrences retained the suffrage journal, Votes For Women, and from the time of their split with the WSPU the paper devoted considerably more space to both the proceedings of the ILP and the Labour Party and to the issues of employment, wages, housing etc., which were of explicit interest to working-class women. For an analysis of these points in relation to the WSPU see L. Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty, Especially Chapter 4, pp. 44-60.

1905.¹¹⁷ Like Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, Christabel Pankhurst's writings also revealed a tension between assertions of difference and arguments for equality. She was initially to argue that qualities which had been seen as innately feminine were in fact specific not to one gender but to all human beings. Thus she perceived, though only occasionally, the connections between the ideology of womanhood and the social construction of gender.

Now, we in this movement are sometimes told that we are selfish, that we are unwomanly, and that we are expecting women to be different from what people have hoped they would be. Some people say: "You want women to be as bad as men, as selfish as men," but I don't think devotion to others should be or is a sex characteristic.¹¹⁸

In the early years of the WSPU, Christabel also made clear the connections between feminism and socialism. In 1905, for example, she wrote to Keir Hardie regarding women's suffrage saying: 'Something very forcible in the present situation is what is wanted - a Labour lead on this question such as we give on other matters.'¹¹⁹ The use of the word 'we' suggests that Christabel still identified herself with the ILP at this time.

¹¹⁷ The first militant act on the part of the WSPU can be dated from October 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were ejected from a Liberal meeting at the Manchester Free Trade Hall for demanding that Sir Edward Grey, a future Liberal cabinet minister, respond to the question of whether the in-coming Liberal Government would grant votes for women. The two women were arrested and opted to serve their prison sentences rather than pay a fine. It is not the intention of this chapter to present a detailed description of the development of militant tactics, nevertheless, militancy took several distinct forms. The first phase followed the example set by the Free Trade Hall incident and consisted mainly of interrupting meetings organised by the Liberals. This phase continued until 1908 when the first stone throwing ushered in the second phase of damage to property. At this time also the first hunger strikes occurred. During this second phase militancy was suspended on three occasions whilst three Conciliation Bills were in progress. The Conciliation Bills were the result of the establishment of an all-party committee formed to consider women's suffrage. None of these Bills, however, was backed by the Government and were, therefore, introduced as Private Members' Bills. The final phase of militancy occurred as a result of the failure of the last Conciliation Bill in 1912. From this point onwards the WSPU decided that all politicians, excepting the Conservatives, were the legitimate object of attack, as were all forms of property.

¹¹⁸ Christabel Pankhurst, 'The Political Outlook'. Votes For Women. Vol. 2, No. 43, December 31, 1908. p. 34.

¹¹⁹ Christabel Pankhurst to Keir Hardie. May 4, 1905. Archives of the ILP. FJC 1905/56.

However, as the WSPU began to sever its connections with Manchester and, importantly, with the work of the women in the Lancashire and Cheshire Committee and as militant tactics increased, Christabel Pankhurst's line of argument shifted ground. By 1913 the trajectory of Pankhurst's feminism was complete and had become a rejection of all association with men and their political parties, and an explicit recognition of women as constituting a sex-class.¹²⁰

Social justice will never be established until the men's point of view of which our present social system is the expression, is corrected by the women's point of view. Therefore women who come into the militant suffragette movement wearing the label of one or other of the men's political parties learn to discard these labels because they realise that what is needed for the regeneration of society is not the separation of women into various classes, different parties and divided camps but joint action for a common purpose - that is to say for the establishment in social practice of women's ideals.¹²¹

Militancy represented the point in Pankhurst's ideology at which the tension between difference and equality was broken and where women were seen as morally superior to men. It may have breached conventional views of womanhood and 'feminine' behaviour but at the same time it served to confirm Pankhurst in her view that men alone constituted the enemy.¹²²

¹²⁰ It needs to be said, however, that Emmeline Pankhurst retained her contacts with the socialist movement for much longer than Christabel. In 1912 Emmeline wrote to Keir Hardie expressing her deep regret that Hardie could do no more in relation to the WSPU. Christabel was certainly unaware of her mother's correspondence with Hardie as Emmeline ended her letter by saying that she would not show Hardie's letters to her. Emmeline Pankhurst to Keir Hardie. (November?) 1912. Archives of the ILP. FJC 1912/205.

¹²¹ Christabel Pankhurst, 'Independence'. The Suffragette, Vol. 2, No. 57, November 14, 1913. p. 103. Quoted by Elizabeth Sarah, 'Christabel Pankhurst: Reclaiming Her Power', in Dale Spender, ed., Feminist Theorists. Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions The Women's Press, London 1983. p. 276.

¹²² For a description of the effects militancy had upon these conventional views and the manner in which it was used as a weapon against the suffragettes see Rosamund Billington, 'Ideology and Feminism: Why the Suffragettes Were "Wild Women"'. Women's Studies International Forum, Vol. 5, No. 6. 1982. pp. 663-674. See also Caroline Morrell, Black Friday. Violence Against Women In The Suffragette Movement. Women's Research and Resources Centre, London 1981.

Militancy has, however, been the subject of considerable discussion by historians. In her assessment of Pankhurst's ideas, Elizabeth Sarah has argued that militancy and the WSPU's shift away from its socialist roots represented the determination of an autonomous sisterhood 'to challenge male power directly by unleashing the power of women'.¹²³ It was, in Sarah's view, pre-eminently a struggle against patriarchy – a sex war – and she has castigated socialist feminist historians for failing to see this in their criticisms of Pankhurst's lack of attention to class.¹²⁴ Susan Kent agrees with Sarah's assessment arguing that Pankhurst's philosophy was primarily an attack against masculine construction of sexuality and the double sexual standard.¹²⁵ Militancy certainly revealed male sexual contempt for women, as the survivors of street battles testified.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, if militancy was the point at which the WSPU broke away from conventional behaviour, other historians have argued that the potentially revolutionary effects of this development were blunted.

In her examination of the WSPU Martha Vicinus has argued that hunger striking, the ultimate act of militancy, contained a paradox: 'although the suffragettes had insisted upon overthrowing the shackles of the past, they now embraced their victimization, attempting to turn it into a new, yet familiar, martyrdom. Bodily purity came to mean rejecting men and embracing death for the sake of the vote.'¹²⁷ Les Garner agrees that 'a militant campaign had important feminist implications – the destruction of the stereotype image of woman as a frail and weak creature, incapable of

¹²³ E. Sarah, 'Christabel Pankhurst'. p. 279.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 263-267 & pp. 272-282.

¹²⁵ S. Kent, *Sex and Suffrage*. pp. 207-209.

¹²⁶ See, for example, the quotations concerning police brutality in C. Morrell, *Black Friday*. pp. 32-36.

¹²⁷ M. Vicinus, *Independent Women*. p. 276.

physical force'.¹²⁸ However, she also argues that militancy was far less effective than it could have been because of the WSPU's increasing isolation from other wider social movements of the time.¹²⁹ Thus, in a period of considerable social upheaval which included constitutional crises, potential civil war in Ulster and turmoil in the industrial world, the WSPU remained aloof from all these events asserting continually that the vote alone was women's concern: 'It was not class, nor economic power that mattered, but *votes*.'¹³⁰ Christabel Pankhurst's own words lend support to this argument for she wrote: 'Our main concern was not with the *numbers* of women to be enfranchised but with the removal of a stigma upon womanhood as such. Even if the vote were to be given only to women with black hair or to women of a certain height, it would mean that the barrier against women as women had been broken.'¹³¹

These differing interpretations of the militancy of the WSPU reflect, to a large degree, contemporary divisions in feminist thought. For Elizabeth Sarah, Christabel Pankhurst was a radical feminist who attacked male power – patriarchy – at its roots and asserted a common bond between women. Garner, on the other hand, puts forward a socialist feminist argument which emphasises Pankhurst's lack of a class analysis and the WSPU's increasing isolation from other important social movements. There is evidence to support both sides of this debate. Suffrage campaigners were

¹²⁸ L. Garner, Stepping Stones To Women's Liberty, p. 48.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 49.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 52. Henry Pelling has recently argued against George Dangerfield's thesis that industrial unrest, the Irish question and suffragette militancy were all connected. Pelling sees a connection only between the Irish question and women's suffrage because any act of enfranchisement needed to be accompanied by a corresponding redistribution act and the Irish MPs would not accept any measure of redistribution until Home Rule had been secured. Thus a delay on Home Rule directly impinged upon the chances of a women's suffrage bill. Henry Pelling, 'The Labour Unrest', in Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, Macmillan, London 1986, pp. 147–164, especially pp. 163–164.

¹³¹ C. Pankhurst, Unshackled, p. 186.

to testify to the enormous impact the movement had upon their consciousness of themselves as members of a subject class drawn together by the common bonds of womanhood.¹³² Yet, according to Sylvia Pankhurst, as quoted above, Christabel Pankhurst was not interested in the claims of working-class women.

When, in 1912, the WSPU formally announced its intention to attack Labour as well as Liberal politicians,¹³³ the last bonds between the WSPU and socialism were torn asunder. Keir Hardie wrote to Emmeline Pankhurst in 1912 declaring the new policy 'suicidal' and arguing that other sections of the women's suffrage movement 'realise even now that the Labour Party, with all its shortcomings, is yet the only force in politics upon which the Women's movement can depend'.¹³⁴ Where previously the heightened status given to the vote as the symbol of women's oppression was, albeit to an increasingly lesser extent, anchored in the belief that it was connected with working-class oppression, the rejection of any association with socialism and Christabel Pankhurst's attitude regarding working-class women in particular, finally exposed the limitations of the demand for the vote when divorced from other demands for liberation. Whilst the vote was considered to be only a means to an end the constitutionalism inherent within the demand for women's enfranchisement was minimised. But when the vote became seen as an end in itself and as the sole symbol of women's oppression then the desire to be part of the constitution over-rode the

¹³² See Constance Lytton, Prisons and Prisoners. Some Personal Experiences. (1914). Virago, London 1988. Especially Chapter 2 'My Conversion'. pp. 9-30. See also E. Pankhurst, My Own Story. pp. 266-269. Pankhurst here draws parallels between the treatment of men on strike and those threatening civil war in Ulster over Home Rule for Ireland and argues that only suffragists were arrested and imprisoned because of men's double sexual standard.

¹³³ See 'The Labour Party and Woman Suffrage', Votes For Women. Vol. 6, No. 242. October 25 1912. p. 59.

¹³⁴ Keir Hardie to Emmeline Pankhurst. November 7, 1912. Archives of the ILP. FJC 1912/158.

vote's purported revolutionary effects. As Christabel Pankhurst wrote in 1913:

The vote is the symbol of freedom and equality. Any class which is denied the vote is branded as an inferior class. Women's disenfranchisement is to them a perpetual lesson in servility, and to men it teaches arrogance and injustice where their dealings with women are concerned. The inferiority of women is a hideous lie which has been enforced by law and woven into the British Constitution, and it is quite hopeless to expect reform between the relationship of the sexes until women are politically enfranchised.¹³⁵

Some historians, such as David Mitchell and George Dangerfield, have been apt to see in these expressions of independence from the established political parties the fulminations of a woman driven by hatred of men and a lust for personal power.¹³⁶ Accordingly, they have tended to stress personality as the critical element in the development of the feminism of the WSPU. But this attention to personalities has been accompanied by a corresponding lack of attention to ideological inheritance.

The seemingly contradictory feminist discourse, from socialist to conservative, espoused by Christabel Pankhurst reveals its own internal logic when it is analysed in terms of the feminist and socialist problematics. Gendered ideology formed a critical component of the common sense of both women and men in Victorian and Edwardian England. This ideological division between the sexes was reinforced at every level - political, cultural, social and industrial. It may be regarded, therefore, as a pre-eminent organising principle of social existence. It also provided the

¹³⁵ Christabel Pankhurst, The Great Scourge And How To End It. The Woman's Press, London 1913. p. 118. Quoted by E. Sarah, 'Christabel Pankhurst: Reclaiming Her Power'. p. 269.

¹³⁶ The very title of David Mitchell's work, Queen Christabel, suggests a less than balanced judgment. See also George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England. (1935). Paladin, London 1972. pp.157-158. Elizabeth Sarah's comments regarding Liddington & Norris's assessment of Pankhurst are also of relevance here. 'Christabel Pankhurst: Reclaiming Her Power'. pp. 266-267.

framework for both feminism and socialism, because although they each looked towards a future whereby gender and/or class inequalities had been abolished, they were at the same time framed within the context of the profoundly divided society in which they arose. The campaign for women's suffrage epitomised this tension between liberation and acceptance of the *status quo*.

By the time that some women were granted the vote in 1918 it would appear that Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst had retreated into a reactionary political stance. Throughout the war they were enthusiastic supporters of the war effort declaring that they were prepared 'to hold great meetings for women all over the country and enlist women for war service'.¹³⁷ To this end WSPU members handed out white feathers to men not in uniform.¹³⁸ Towards the end of the war the Pankhursts formed the Women's Party which declared itself to be 'opposed to all forms of compromise with the enemy'.¹³⁹ The constitutionalism which was always latent in the demand for the vote expressed itself in virulent attacks upon the Russia, and its perceived supporters, who had pulled out of the war and in an exaggerated respect for British institutions. As Christabel Pankhurst wrote:

We women who demanded entrance into the charmed circle of the British Constitution did so in reverence and loyalty to that Constitution which, when all is said and done, is the finest existing instrument of human government...Considering that the Government and Parliament stand between this nation and destruction, on home and foreign fronts, it is essential in every way to uphold the authority of Government and Parliament. The Bolsheviks, of course, have a very different aim, which is to weaken, and finally, destroy, the authority of

¹³⁷ Emmeline Pankhurst, The Daily Mail June 25, 1915. GTC 663c/3.

¹³⁸ See L. Garner, Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty, p. 55.

¹³⁹ 'The New Women's Party', The Daily Mail November 10, 1917. GTC 346/52

Government and Parliament and substitute it for their own usurped authority.¹⁴⁰

To perceive this shift within the thought of particularly Christabel Pankhurst solely in terms of it being an inevitability, given the WSPU's middle classness and their hostility towards men, is to deny the contradictory and complex inheritance of feminism and socialism bequeathed to activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By seeing the consciousness of female subjectivity as a 'problematic potentiality' it is possible to analyse the Pankhursts' thought not in terms of a sharp break with their earlier socialist feminism, but, rather, as the expression of an ambivalent consciousness pulled between both acceptance of and resistance to contemporary definitions of womanhood.¹⁴¹ Their acts of militancy and their assertion of difference and separateness from men embodied the two potentials of feminism; for if militancy signified a direct challenge to received notions of female behaviour, the emphasis upon the moral superiority of women entailed acceptance of the dualistic vision of culture and society. When this was coupled with a stance of independence from any other feminist or socialist group the restraints placed upon a latent tendency towards conservatism embodied in the espousal of gender difference were broken. Antagonism which had been directed specifically towards men, particularly in Christabel Pankhurst's book The Great Scourge And How To End It, thus became translated into support for the war and respect for British institutions.

In the same year, 1912, that the WSPU announced its intention of opposing Labour Party candidates at elections, the National Union of Women's

¹⁴⁰ Christabel Pankhurst, 'Give Parliament A Chance'. The Daily Sketch, February 14, 1919. GTC 601/58.

¹⁴¹ Thus T. Davis et. al. have argued that this could be 'the product of a consciousness which, out of joint with a society in transition, sought an active solace elsewhere'. 'The Public Face of Feminism'. p. 312.

Suffrage Societies announced its intention of working with the Labour Party through the establishment of an Election Fighting Fund.¹⁴² The immediate impetus behind this move by the NUWSS came from the announcement at the Labour Party Conference held in January 1912 that the party would not accept any measure of franchise reform which did not include women. This, coupled with Asquith's statement that the Government would sponsor a Bill to extend the suffrage to all men whilst leaving open the possibility of an amendment to include women, finally convinced the NUWSS that they could no longer expect reform to come from the Liberal Party.¹⁴³

The official policy of the NUWSS was that it was in character non-party political; that is to say, it was officially pledged to remain aloof from party politics, for, like the WSPU, it adjudged women's suffrage to be an issue which transcended the divisions between the parties. As an editorial in the journal of the NUWSS, The Common Cause, stated:

Where women join in men's organisations we find them almost universally subservient and inert; custom and tradition are too much for them...We have had a great work to do, and it could not be done through party...The hope, the growth of self-respect, the eager searching for truth, which have arisen among women of all classes, could never be fostered in them by mere adherence to parties, representing men's views and methods.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² In April 1912 Kathleen Courtney, one of two honorary secretaries of the NUWSS, wrote to Arthur Henderson suggesting an informal and confidential meeting between the two groups. Archives of the British Labour Party. Series III: General Correspondence and Political Records. Part 6. LP/WOM/12/1. By May 16 negotiations had progressed to the stage where the NUWSS could release a press statement regarding the new arrangement. Archives of the British Labour Party. Series III: General Correspondence and Political Records. Part 6. LP/WOM/12/19.

¹⁴³ See letter from Kathleen Courtney to Arthur Henderson April 23, 1912 in which she lists the reasons why the NUWSS was disillusioned with the Liberal Party and why it was now looking to the Labour Party. Archives of the British Labour Party. Series III: General Correspondence and Political Records. Part 6. LP/WOM/12/4. The details of the negotiations between the NUWSS and the Labour Party have already been described by S. Holton, Feminism and Democracy. pp. 76-96. These details will not, therefore, be reiterated here.

¹⁴⁴ 'Our Point of View'. The Common Cause. Vol. 1, No. 2, April 22, 1909. p. 19. History of Women.

The object of the NUWSS, declared the Common Cause in 1909 was to:

demand that the mother-half of humanity should be given its proper place: that the preserver and producer of life, the maker of men, should be as highly honoured as the destroyer of life, the maker of things: that the temperate, affectional woman-nature, intent upon the conservation of the home and the race, should have its due representation beside the more extreme and appetitive male nature.¹⁴⁵

The parallels between the arguments of the NUWSS and those of the WSPU are striking. The same emphasis upon organisational autonomy was matched by a corresponding stress upon innate gender difference. As Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the President of the NUWSS, wrote:

With regard to the differences between men and women, those who advocate the enfranchisement of women have no wish to disregard them or make little of them. On the contrary, we base our claim to representation to a large extent on them. If men and women were exactly alike, the representation of men would represent us; but not being alike, that wherein we differ is unrepresented under the present system. The motherhood of women, either actual or potential, is one of those great facts of everyday life which we must never lose sight of. To women, as mothers, are given the charge of the home and the care of children. Women are, therefore, by Nature, as well as by occupation and training, more accustomed than men to concentrate their minds on the home and domestic side of things. But this difference between men and women, instead of being a reason against their enfranchisement, seems to me the strongest possible reason in favour of it; we want the home and the domestic side of things to count for more in politics and in the administration of public affairs than they do at present.¹⁴⁶

And she stated that it was the condition of the home which determined the moral character of the nation:

Depend upon it, the most important institution in the country is the home. Anything which threatens the purity and stability of the home

¹⁴⁵ 'Our Point of View'. The Common Cause. Vol. 1, No. 1, April 15, 1909. p. 3. History of Women.

¹⁴⁶ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Extracts From various Articles and Speeches On Women's Suffrage. NUWSS, London n.d.(c.1909). Gerritsen Collection No. 841.2. pp. 6-7.

threatens the very life-blood of the country; if the homes of the nation are pure, if the standard of duty, of self-restraint and of justice is maintained in them, such a nation has nothing to fear; but if the contrary of all these things can be said, the nation is rotten at the core, and its downfall is only a question of time. Up to the present, my belief is that the home side and the political side of things have been kept too far apart, as if they had nothing to do with one another...[B]y strengthening the independence of women, I think we shall strengthen their true native womanliness: they will not so often be led away by the gunpowder and glory will-o'-the-wisp, which is really alien to the womanly nature, but will much more certainly than now cast their influence on whatever side seems to them to make for peace, purity, and love.¹⁴⁷

Fawcett's comments indicate how little her ideology of womanhood had changed in the years since she put forward the case for women's enfranchisement in the pages of the Nineteenth Century journal. Yet a number of factors made the leadership less important than the changing nature and growth of its membership. Partly as a result of the attention given to the issue by the activities of the WSPU and the corresponding general distaste for escalating militancy, the number of local societies affiliated to the NUWSS had grown dramatically – from 31 in 1906 to 207 in 1910.¹⁴⁸ This rapid growth had resulted in a concentration of power in the hands of the central Executive Committee but it also precipitated a major re-organisation of the National Union as a federated body of local, regional societies.¹⁴⁹ A further effect of this growth and re-organisation was the opportunity it presented for women from diverse political backgrounds to express their views in contradistinction to the Liberal-oriented leadership of the NUWSS. When working-class women were appointed as organisers for the Union the links that had been made between the NUWSS and working

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 7–8.

¹⁴⁸ Figures cited in S. Holton, Feminism and Democracy, p. 40.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 40–41.

women in the 1890s were consolidated and extended.¹⁵⁰ From 1909 onwards within the pages of the The Common Cause the failure of the Liberal government to commit itself to a measure of women's enfranchisement was roundly attacked. It was at this juncture that the 'radical suffragists', the working-class women from Lancashire and Cheshire who, like the WSPU, had found themselves in opposition to the dominant voices within the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party, were able to become a significant influence within the NUWSS and thus found themselves once more among the mainstream labour movement.¹⁵¹ Thus at the same time that the WSPU was moving away from its industrial links the NUWSS was fostering them.

Catharine Marshall, the Parliamentary Secretary of the NUWSS and one of the main proponents of the Election Fighting Fund, claimed, when urging that the Labour Party and the NUWSS should work closer together, that: 'We have broken down class barriers in our movement, just as you have broken down sex barriers in yours'.¹⁵²

We welcome as a fellow-worker anyone who wants to work, even if she happens to be a Duchess. Cannot we do for you in the matter of class antagonism, what you are doing for us in the matter of sex antagonism? Do not mistake me. I am not arguing against class *consciousness*, but

¹⁵⁰ See J. Liddington & J. Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us, pp. 213-216, 222-225 & 247-249. See also S. Holton, Feminism and Democracy, p. 68.

¹⁵¹ Selina Cooper had been an organiser for the NUWSS from 1906. As such, she was at that time one of very few working-class women within the Union. By 1910, however, she was joined in her activities by fellow socialist feminists such as Annot Robinson and Ellen Wilkinson. See Jill Liddington, The Life and Times of A Respectable Rebel. Selina Cooper 1864-1946, Virago, London 1984, p. 186 & pp. 210-211. Ada Nield Chew became an organiser in 1911 following her reversal in 1910 regarding adult suffrage. See Doris Nield Chew, ed., Ada Nield Chew. The Life and Writings of a Working Woman, Virago, London 1982, pp. 42-54.

¹⁵² Catherine Marshall, 'On How Women Can Help The ILP'. Labour Leader, April 16, 1914. GTC 350/91.

against class *bitterness*. The former is a necessary stage in the process of emancipation.¹⁵³

And Marshall continued:

How can we let ourselves fall a prey to sex-bitterness when the men of the ILP are helping us at every turn in our work in the country - when we see that you feel our wrongs as keenly as we do ourselves? Above all, when we know that you are prepared to forego any further franchise gains for yourselves until women can share in them - we realise that it is not against men we have to fight, but against a wrong system, which has erected an artificial barrier between men and women, dividing into two camps those who ought to be comrades, working side by side.¹⁵⁴

Marshall's enthusiastic report of the new alliance between the NUWSS and the Labour Party minimised both the class and gender divisions which continued to exist in the two bodies. However, it reflected more her own consciousness of the relationship between class and gender oppression than was typical of the leadership as a whole.¹⁵⁵ Working-class women, including those who were socialists, did join the National Union but their experiences did not always conform to the picture painted by Marshall. Selina Cooper was urged by one member: 'not to let that class-hatred and bitterness come into your heart again...*None* of us can help society being broken up into classes, and therefore if we cannot help it, why hate each other for it...Let us try and find out where we can all help each other regardless of class, as at the Suffrage meeting on Thursday.'¹⁵⁶ Similarly Doris Chew recalled that her mother, Ada 'was always keenly aware of the

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ See S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*. Chapters 4 & 5 for an examination of the tensions that the Election Fighting Fund created within the NUWSS.

¹⁵⁶ Susan Power to Selina Cooper, October 28, 1906. Quoted in Jill Liddington, 'Women Cotton Workers and the Suffrage Campaign', in Sandra Burman, ed., *Fit Work For Women*. Croom Helm, London & Canberra 1979. p. 110.

difference in education and upbringing between herself and the middle-class women around her, and was fiercely determined to maintain her dignity. There were occasions when she felt that some of her colleagues were inclined to condescend to those who, like herself, could not afford to work on a voluntary basis, and then her pride rose up'.¹⁵⁷ The tension between those who were either convinced socialists or had become converted to socialism and those who retained support for the Liberal Party, however, did not erupt until the First World War.¹⁵⁸ In 1915, the National Union split, with most of the leading members, excluding Mrs. Fawcett, leaving to form what eventually became the Women's International League For Peace and Freedom.¹⁵⁹

Within the National Union can be discerned the same ambivalent consciousness of women's subjectivity which also determined the apparent change in perspective of the WSPU and, more specifically, that of Christabel Pankhurst. For some of its women, such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the vote was a means for women, especially middle-class women, to introduce a 'feminine morality' into the male sphere of politics. But criticisms of the 'masculine' nature of existing political parties and, by extension, Parliament itself, were matched by a determination to enter and change that 'masculine' world. Thus support for the *status quo*, in the form of a tacit constitutionalism, was accompanied by a desire to radically alter that constitution. These aims represented the potentially radical edge of gendered ideology when re-formulated in women's favour. Nevertheless, it

¹⁵⁷ D. Nield Chew, Ada Nield Chew. The Life And Writings Of A Working Woman pp. 46-47.

¹⁵⁸ See S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*. Chapter 6 pp. 116-133 for a discussion of the impact of war upon the NUWSS.

¹⁵⁹ See Anne Wiltsher, Most Dangerous Women. Feminist Peace Campaigners Of The Great War. Pandora, London 1985 pp. 56-81 for an account of this split between pacifists and those who lent support to the war effort.

remained a radicalism which was ultimately constrained by the constitutional ideology in which it was framed.

But the moves taken to achieve an alliance with the Labour Party delayed the full development of the reactionary side of this perspective until the advent of the First World War when the greater threat to society tore apart this temporary alliance and exposed the fundamental differences between socialist and Liberal feminists. Until that moment of rupture the NUWSS, through its closer relationship with the Labour Party, represented the most important organisation through which socialist feminists could link their desire for the vote with a more revolutionary concept of social change. As Clementina Black of the Women's Industrial Council and a member of the National Union wrote:

It was not always a custom that women should stay at home while men went out to get the family's livelihood...But in the history of all races, as they advance in civilisation, a period arrives in which women are relegated to seclusion in the family...This division of occupations had various secondary results upon the characters of men and women...The moral effects of women's dependence upon men for support were also in some respects injurious. A dependent creature has to live by pleasing the creature that supports it; and it is difficult to say which of the two suffers most from the practice of subserviency...In short, the division between the "spheres" of men and women has tended in every country to make women puny and petty, and to make men coarse and arrogant...Both these extremes are bad for the community. Both are signs of transition. And the best citizens at this moment are those who understand the true nature of the transition, and who see that the greatest social need of this country is the drawing of women out of the old family seclusion into the wider public and national life. Family life, no less than national life, needs that change; and of that change women's suffrage is both the symbol and the instrument.¹⁶⁰

Both the WSPU and the NUWSS revealed the complex legacy of feminism bequeathed a century earlier by Mary Wollstonecraft when she created a

¹⁶⁰ Clementina Black, 'The Vote And Race Progress'. The Woman Worker. No. 4, June 26, 1908. p. 94. WTUL Papers.

feminist discourse which replicated the division between reason and passion embodied in Enlightenment ideology. However, in both organisations this discourse was not applied unproblematically. That is, not only did they both exhibit a tension between assertions of difference and arguments for women's equality, this tension was itself affected by the related problematic of independence and alliance in regard to men's organisations. The shift from socialism to conservatism within the WSPU is understandable only when it is analysed in the context of the revolutionary and reactionary potentials for a consciousness of female subjectivity embodied within the feminist problematic. Moreover, such a shift, from equality to sex-class, needs also to be seen in the context of male socialist hostility to feminist aims.

Thus if women's awareness of gendered ideology provided the spark which initiated the process of detachment between feminism and socialism, from alliance to autonomy, it also contained the potential for a more complex critique of society whereby both female and male subjectivity needed to be profoundly altered. It was here that the work of working-class socialist women and the democratic suffragists noted by Holton within the NUWSS became critical. Thwarted in their early attempts to create a socialism which transcended gendered ideology, they later sought to create a feminism which also contained a class perspective. By retaining their connections with the socialist tradition from which they emerged these women were able to consistently challenge both the androcentric nature of socialism and the class-blind nature of liberal feminism. They were able to argue, therefore, for a socialist feminism which acknowledged difference and equality and for an organisational status which was both autonomous and allied.

But socialist feminism took many forms, and these suffragists represented only one variety. For whilst they were engaged in a critical re-

definition of both socialism and feminism, other socialist feminists actively sought to work within the boundaries of a socialism as formulated by, for example, the Labour Party and the Fabian Society. These women form the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN'S POLITICAL GROUPS TO 1914

The previous two chapters have focused on socialist feminists who campaigned for women's industrial and political rights from a position of relative independence from the mainstream labour movement. In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, another group of socialist women came into existence; those who belonged to women's political organisations such as the Women's Labour League (WLL), founded in 1906, and the much smaller but influential Fabian Women's Group (FWG), founded in 1908, which as their names suggest were linked to the Labour Party and the Fabian Society respectively. Given the plethora of works on the Labour Party¹ and its two close associates, the ILP² and the trade unions³, and a lesser number

¹ The number of articles is far too numerous to mention and what follows is only a selection of the major texts. See G.D.H. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914 (1948). Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1978; Henry Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (1954). Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979; Ralph Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism. A Study in the Politics of Labour. Merlin Press, London 1972; and Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1974.

² See particularly R.E. Dowse, Left in the Centre. The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940. Longmans, Green & Co., London 1966 and David Howell, British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1983.

³ See B.C. Roberts, The Trade Union Congress 1868-1921. George Allen & Unwin, London 1958; Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism. (1963). Penguin, Harmondsworth 1981 and A. Clegg, A. Fox & A.F. Thompson, A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889. Vol. 1. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1964.

of studies on the Fabian Society⁴, it is therefore all the more surprising that no full-length study exists of either the WLL⁵ or the FWG.⁶

The development of socialist women's political groups separate from the larger male-dominated political organisations in terms of identity yet inextricably linked to them in terms both of organisation and, to a certain extent, shared policies and objectives, occurred mainly in the years from 1906 onwards.⁷ The date is not without significance: 1906 was the year of

⁴ For the Fabians, the classic study remains A.N. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1966. See also Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians Quartet, London 1979 & Ian Britain, Fabianism and Culture. A Study in British Socialism and the Arts 1884-1914 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982. A centenary publication appeared in 1984, Patricia Pugh, Educate, Agitate, Organize. 100 Years of Fabian Socialism, Methuen, London 1984.

⁵ The studies which do exist are the collection of essays in Lucy Middleton, ed., Women in the Labour Movement, Croom Helm, London 1977. Lucy Middleton's article in the collection 'Women in Labour Politics' is too full of basic errors to be taken seriously; whilst Margherita Rendel's article, 'The Contribution Of The Women's Labour League' is more considered but tends to ignore the diversity of opinion on this question within the League. The only other articles are the two by Caroline Rowan, 'Mothers, Vote Labour' The State, the Labour Movement and Working-Class Mothers, 1900-1918', in Rosalind Brunt & Caroline Rowan, eds., Feminism, Culture and Politics, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1982 & 'Women in the Labour Party, 1906-1920', Feminist Review, Issue 12, 1982.

⁶ Most of the work on Fabian women has concentrated to a disproportionate degree upon Beatrice Webb. See Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie, eds., The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Three Volumes, Virago, London 1982-1984; Barbara Caine, 'Beatrice Webb and the "Woman Question"', History Workshop Journal, Issue 14, 1982 and her full-length study of the Potter family, Destined to be Wives. The Sisters of Beatrice Webb, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988. The writings of Fabian women have recently been gathered together. See Sally Alexander, ed., Women's Fabian Tracts, Routledge, London 1988.

⁷ The Women's Labour League was formed in 1906. The Fabian Women's Group was formed two years later in 1908. Prior to these dates there were women's groups associated with socialist organisations such as the Women's Committee of the Social Democratic Federation, which was established in 1905 with the aim of forming Women's Circles throughout the country. In terms of both numbers and influence, the Women's Committee of the SDF remained very much a minority organisation when compared to both the WLL and the FWG. The Women's Co-operative Guild, which was established in 1883, was the oldest of all the women's organisations. However, the Guild was not in any strict sense a political organisation. It is perhaps more accurately described as a pressure group. Its main body, the Co-operative Union, was not affiliated to the Labour Party during the period under discussion. For a description of the often difficult relationship between the Co-operative Union and the Labour Party see R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 pp. 43-47 & 178-183

the landslide victory of the Liberal Party at the General Election after more than twenty years of almost uninterrupted Conservative rule.⁸ At the same election, twenty-nine candidates under the auspices of the Labour Representation Committee were returned to Parliament.⁹ Accordingly, the name of the LRC was changed to that of the Labour Party to denote that it, like the Conservative Party, represented an opposition party in Parliament with its own whips and parliamentary chairman.¹⁰

The formation of the Labour Party appeared to mark a high point of unity within the labour movement. This unity was, however, largely illusory. The twenty-nine members elected covered a wide spectrum of political opinion, ranging from self-professed socialists to ex-Liberal trade unionists. Moreover, they owed their success to an electoral pact with the Liberal Party.¹¹ These two factors, together with the large parliamentary majority of the Liberals, effectively restricted the independence of the Labour Party until 1910 when the two elections of that year wiped out the Liberal majority and allowed the Labour Party, along with the Irish M.Ps, to hold the balance of power.¹² When the Women's Labour League was established in 1906 those factors which restricted the scope of the Labour Party also had an impact upon the role and influence of the League.

⁸ Since 1885, the Liberals had achieved power on only three occasions, the shortest of which lasted six months in 1886 and the longest period was for a little under three years between 1892 and 1895.

⁹ The members returned were: Liberals 399; Conservatives 159; Irish Nationalists 83 and Labour 29. Figures cited in Michael Bentley, Politics Without Democracy 1815-1914, Fontana, London 1984 p. 346.

¹⁰ See R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 pp. xvii-xviii. The first parliamentary chairman was Keir Hardie.

¹¹ For a fuller discussion of this electoral pact see James Hinton, Labour and Socialism. A History of the British Labour Movement 1867-1974 Wheatsheaf Books, Brighton 1983. pp. 73-75.

¹² C. L. Mowat, 'Ramsay MacDonald and the Labour Party', in Asa Briggs & John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History. Vol. 2 Macmillan, London 1971. pp. 134-135.

The years from 1906 to 1914 had a further significance. During that time the Liberal administration ushered in a series of welfare reforms which appeared to demonstrate that parliament was the key institution for the implementation of reforms.¹³ The 'new Liberalism', which was collectivist in principle and had been struggled over during the long years when the Liberal Party was in opposition, came to fruition in 1906. This represented a commitment to social democracy which appeared to accord with the aims and objectives of the Labour Party.¹⁴ Yet by the end of the First World War in 1918 the Liberal Party was in disarray whilst a mere six years later, in 1924, the Labour Party achieved office for the first time, albeit as a minority government. What had occurred during these years was a fundamental process of detachment and realignment politically in which the Labour Party and the Women's Labour League played a pivotal role.¹⁵

The effects of this Liberal reforming zeal upon the new Labour Party were complex, for it could be argued that there was little to differentiate the Labour Party from the Liberals. Indeed, a debate occurred in Staffordshire in 1907 between the Liberal candidate for Newcastle-under-Lyme, Josiah

¹³ See Bill Schwarz & Martin Durham, "A safe and sane labourism": socialism and the state 1910-24, in Mary Langan & Bill Schwarz, eds., Crises in the British State 1880-1930 Hutchinson, London 1985. p. 128. The reforms included: the introduction of school meals in 1906; school medical inspections in 1907; and the National Insurance Act of 1911.

¹⁴ Social democracy is understood here to mean the gradual process whereby reforms are introduced, through parliament, in order to bring areas of the state directly under the collective control of the government. It represents a respect for existing institutions rather than the desire to see them pulled down.

¹⁵ For a somewhat racy but nevertheless interesting discussion of the process of disintegration of the Liberal Party see George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (1935). Paladin, London 1972. McKibbin's thesis is that the passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 'transformed the conditions under which Labour grew' because it enabled Labour to benefit from a highly developed working-class consciousness which had no reason to vote Liberal. The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 p. xv. A.N. Purdue, however, has argued in his study of the North-East that there was no easy fit between class consciousness, as manifested through trade union membership, and voting Labour. 'The Liberal and Labour Parties in North-East Politics 1900-1914 The Struggle For Supremacy'. International Review of Social History. Vol. XXVI, Part 1, 1981. pp. 1-24.

Wedgwood and Teresa Billington of the ILP on the question of whether the Labour Party should unite with the Liberals.¹⁶ Twenty years earlier, when socialism re-emerged in England, the major debate between socialists concerned the question of whether they should engage in parliamentary activity. By the 1900s, however, the debate was not over reformism *versus* revolution but over the form and content of reform. One result of this was the hardening of the divisions between the Parliamentary Labour Party and the extra-parliamentary socialist movement – between social democracy and socialism – which was transformed into a struggle between the Left as represented by the Independent Labour Party, the British Socialist Party¹⁷ and the Socialist Labour Party¹⁸ on the one hand, and the Labour Party, Fabians and trade unionists on the other hand.¹⁹ Whilst these divisions also had an effect upon socialist women's political groups, they manifested themselves specifically over those issues which were of most concern to socialist feminists – the right to work and the right to vote.

The period covered by this chapter was extremely turbulent both politically, in the form of the suffrage campaigns and Irish unrest, and

¹⁶ Should the Labour Party unite with the Liberals? A Debate Between Mr. Josiah C. Wedgwood and Miss Teresa Billington. Archives of the Independent Labour Party. Pamphlets and Leaflets. Part 1 1893-1908. 1907/64

¹⁷ In 1907 the Social Democratic Federation changed its name to the Social Democratic Party. The name was changed yet again in 1911 to that of the British Socialist Party.

¹⁸ The Socialist Labour Party was formed in 1903 from a breakaway group of the Social Democratic Federation. Its main strength lay in Scotland, particularly in the Clyde region of Glasgow. There was a further split from the Social Democratic Federation in 1905 and this group became the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Both the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party went on to form the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920.

¹⁹ The development of syndicalism among some trade unions between 1910 and 1914 suggests that not all unions were politically aligned to the right wing of the Labour Party. Nevertheless syndicalism was espoused by a small section of the trade union movement only. For further information see R. J. Holton, British Syndicalism 1910-1914 Pluto Press, London 1976. See also the stinging attack upon the Labour Party by Ben Tillett's Is The Parliamentary Labour Party A Failure? 1908. SDF Leaflets and Pamphlets 1883-1931. Additional Pamphlets Vol. 1/9.

industrially - in 1912 alone forty million working days were lost due to strikes.²⁰ The path to social democracy, as the extent of this discontent suggests, was not smooth nor were the form and content of welfare reforms accepted uncritically by working-class women and men.²¹ Such reforms were then, as they are now, sites of struggle and resistance as the state intervened directly in individual lives. It is not the intention of this chapter to discuss in detail the turbulence of this time, except insofar as it directly impinged upon the women's political groups under examination. Of particular relevance here is the form of socialist feminism which the women's political groups developed in the face of three critical factors alluded to above; the imposition of welfare reforms by the state, the composition and influence of the Labour Party, and external criticism from other socialist feminists who were also involved in political and industrial campaigns.

Several historians have noted the connections between concern over imperial efficiency, social welfare and the creation of an ideology of motherhood. The anxiety over Britain's economic performance, which was in decline at a time when that of other nations such as Germany and the United States was increasing, when coupled with a shift from *laissez-faire* to collectivism, encouraged a 'proliferation of discourses' which, in turn, produced points of intervention for the new collectivist state and a

²⁰ Figures cited in B. Schwarz & M. Durham, "A safe and sane labourism": socialism and the state 1910-1924, p. 131.

²¹ The extent of this discontent was not confined to those from the left of the political spectrum. One of the greatest battles the Liberal Government had to fight was over Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' which was introduced in 1909. The House of Lords, which was dominated by Conservative Peers, rejected the Budget thereby provoking a general election. The Liberals were returned to power in January 1910 with a greatly reduced majority, and with the explicit intention of curbing the powers of the House of Lords. This in its turn provoked a further constitutional crisis. After receiving assurances from the new king, George V, that he would be prepared to create sufficient new peers to swamp the Conservative majority - a matter of some 400 new peers being required - the Liberals again went to the polls in December 1910. Once again the Liberals were returned with a diminished majority.

corresponding expansion of experts and commentators on social problems.²² Thus, in particular, theories concerning the future of the British nation, racial degeneration and consequent imperial weakness coalesced around a new ideology of motherhood.²³ Both the Women's Labour League and the Fabian Women's Group played a key role in the formulation and dissemination of this ideology of motherhood from a socialist feminist perspective. In the process, fundamental questions were raised concerning the role of women in politics, particularly in relation to the Labour Party, how women were to be organised, and how the voices of working-class women could be heard as against those of the zealous reformers.

Welfare reforms, then, represented the point of intersection between the needs of women, the needs of the working class as a whole, and those who initiated and implemented the reforms. But because these varying needs and desires intersected it cannot be assumed that there was a simple fit between those who needed the reforms and those who supplied them.²⁴ As Caroline Rowan has written:

Although it is usually the case that capitalism and patriarchy reinforce one another in a given social formation, this cannot always be assumed. For example, some welfare measures might be in the interests of capitalism and working-class women, but not of working-class men.

²² The phrase comes from Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality. Volume 1. An Introduction Allen Lane, London 1979. p. 18.

²³ For a discussion of the relationship between these elements see Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', History Workshop Journal, Issue 5, Spring 1978. See also Jane Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood. Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939, Croom Helm, London 1980.

²⁴ For a discussion of the various responses of socialists, labour and the working class to welfare reform see Pat Thane, 'The Working Class and State 'Welfare' in Britain, 1880-1914', The Historical Journal, Vol. 27, No. 4 1984. pp. 877-900. Working-class women and men were often right to be suspicious of social reform. The Education Act of 1902, for example, replaced the School Boards, which women were eligible to sit on, and gave control of education to county councils, to which they were not eligible. In response to women's protests, the government ordered that at least two women should be co-opted to every local education committee.

We cannot therefore assume a natural alliance between capitalism and patriarchy on the one hand and socialism and feminism on the other.²⁵

Indeed, such a simple fit was impossible for several reasons.

First, women did not possess the vote and could not, therefore, as voiceless citizens, participate in the process of government. An increasingly intolerable anomaly was developing whereby women, as mothers, were expressly acknowledged as citizens of the state yet were denied one of the fundamental rights which underpinned social democracy - the right to vote. Herein can be identified one of the contributory factors behind the demise of the Liberal Party as the party of progress. The women's suffrage campaign illuminated not merely the shortcomings of Liberal social democracy as far as women were concerned, it also exposed differences among and between feminists and socialists over the meaning of womanhood. Socialist women's political groups, no less than those suffrage groups discussed in the previous chapter, were caught up in this struggle over definitions. However, because of their institutional links to, pre-eminently, the Labour Party this struggle assumed a new dimension

A second factor, therefore, which militated against an unproblematic relationship between welfare reformers and recipients concerned competing definitions of womanhood. It is in this area that the feminist and socialist problematics - equality and difference; independence and alliance - can be understood at an institutional level within socialism itself. For unlike the socialist feminists from Manchester who campaigned against protective legislation and unlike also those who campaigned for the extension of the suffrage to women, socialist feminists in the Women's Labour League and the Fabian Women's Group operated to some extent within the parameters laid down by their male-dominated counterparts. More than any other

²⁵ C. Rowan, "Mothers, Vote Labour!" *The State, the Labour Movement and Working-Class Mothers.* p. 60.

feminist and socialist feminist grouping in this period, those socialist feminists who were explicitly linked to the Labour Party faced an acute dilemma when they asserted their needs as women within the boundaries of a political party which gave analytical and practical priority to class.

The development of an ideology of motherhood may have represented a point of coalescence for theories concerning the future of the British race, but it also represented a struggle for a definition of socialist feminism which could speak for the needs of working-class women and, at the same time, overcome the tensions created by the imposition of welfare reforms from above, the political complexion of the Labour Party, and external criticisms from other socialist feminist groupings.

With these considerations in mind, this chapter concentrates primarily upon the largest of the women's socialist political groups, the Women's Labour League. Through the twin foci of women's suffrage and women's right to work the structural and ideological relationship between the League and the Labour Party will be examined. In the process, the ideology of motherhood espoused by the League will also be explored. The latter part of this chapter is concerned to draw a comparison between the League and other feminist groups who also campaigned on these two issues, such as the Fabian Women's Group and the Women's Co-operative Guild.

The Women's Labour League was officially formed in March 1906²⁶ at the home of Margaret MacDonald,²⁷ although for some months prior to this date several local Leagues had already been in existence.²⁸ At the founding conference of the League held in June 1906, Margaret MacDonald, as chairman,²⁹ stated that:

They wanted to show the wives of trade unionists and co-operators particularly, what they had not yet fully discovered, that the best way to look after their homes was by taking interest in the life of the community. They wanted to educate the whole mass of the women workers, trade unionists, and others, until they realised that to improve their condition it was necessary to take up their cause with earnestness on the same lines that men had done.³⁰

MacDonald's words are critical for understanding the subsequent development of the League as they illustrate how the complex and often contradictory inheritance of feminism and socialism entered the League at its moment of formation. Addressing her remarks specifically to women whose husbands were already involved in the socialist and labour

²⁶ Prior to this date negotiations had been carried out between Mary Macpherson, the honorary secretary of the Railway Women's Guild, and Ramsay MacDonald for about 18 months. See Archives of the British Labour Party. Series III. General Correspondence and Political Records. Part 1: 1900-1906 especially LRC 17/310-313; LRC 18/207-208; LRC 24/284-285.

²⁷ Margaret MacDonald, 1870-1911, became a member of the Independent Labour Party in 1896, one year after she first met Ramsay MacDonald, whom she married in 1896. Two years prior to joining the ILP she had become a member of the Women's Industrial Council, a body which was led by Clementina Black. She was to remain with this group until 1910 during which time most of her efforts were directed towards exposing sweated labour. She was also a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, although she does not appear to have been an exceptionally active member of this group. See her entry in Joyce M Bellamy & John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. Vol. 6. Macmillan, London 1982. pp. 181-185.

²⁸ These early groups had been formed in Stockport, Preston, Barrow-in-Furness, Eccles, Nelson and Wigan. It was no accident that these original groups were formed in areas which were already noted for their commitment to socialism.

²⁹ As this was the common usage of the time, I have chosen to retain the word 'chairman' rather than the modern 'chairperson'.

³⁰ *Report of the First Conference of the Women's Labour League 1906*, p. 2. WLL 2.

movements, MacDonald made her appeal to them on the basis of their role as homemakers.³¹ Gendered ideology, in the specific sense here of the sexual division of labour thus became a constituent element in the programme of the League. As a result, the potentially radical nature of MacDonald's appeal - the linking of the family with political life - was countered by her belief that the aim of political involvement was to make women better homemakers. In other words, political activity would confirm the notion of difference inherent within gendered ideology by emphasising women's role in the home. Yet at the same time, MacDonald urged women to pursue emancipation 'on the same lines' as men. From the start, then, a crucial dichotomy emerged between the League's perception of women as individuals participating in struggles for industrial and political rights, and its perception of women as homemakers struggling to improve home life through an enhancement of the position of the family within society.³² Indeed, as we shall see, many of the campaigns conducted by the WLL revealed this dichotomy to be a central concern and a potential source of division.

MacDonald's words have a further importance. The contradiction she introduced in terms of feminist strategy represented also a contradiction in feminist consciousness. The recourse to gendered ideology demonstrated the extent to which notions of difference had entered consciousness and, indeed, framed part of the 'common sense' perceptions of women and men. But the demand that women should emancipate themselves as men had done showed a consciousness pulling in the other direction, towards a future

³¹ A similar appeal to women on their basis as homemakers was made in the 1830s and 1840s at the height of Chartist campaigning. In that period, as in the period under consideration, this appeal was designed not so much to introduce structural changes within the working-class household as to reinforce the division of labour between the sexes. See Barbara Taylor, *Eye and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Virago, London 1983. pp. 265-268.

³² See Margaret Stacey & Marion Price, *Women, Power, and Politics*, Tavistock Publications, London 1981. pp. 81-83.

state of equality. This ambivalent feminist consciousness, as we have seen, was not confined to the women of the League, it was also evident in the ranks of the suffrage campaigners. The difference between suffragists and the League is that whilst the former were autonomous organisations the League remained always within the ambit of the Labour Party.

This contradiction was itself compounded by the discrepancy between those women who comprised the first executive committee of the League and the constituency of working-class women it was addressing. The composition of the executive committee elected at the first conference indicated the breadth and depth of experience, both political and industrial, which women brought to the leadership of the new League. Miss Bell was a Labour Guardian in Leicester.³³ Charlotte Despard was a member of both the Independent Labour Party and the Women's Social and Political Union and was shortly to break from that latter body to help form the Women's Freedom League in 1907.³⁴ Mary Gawthorpe was Secretary of the Leeds Women's Labour League and was at the same time on the National Committee of the Women's Social and Political Union and Vice-President of the Leeds

³³ Where a christian name is unknown, I have chosen to adopt the form of address which was common to this period.

³⁴ Charlotte Despard, 1844-1939, was a close friend of Edward Carpenter. She had been a member of the Social Democratic Federation as well as the Independent Labour Party. From the turn of the century until 1928 her main work was concerned with obtaining universal suffrage for women. She spent her last years speaking for causes such as Irish nationalism and anti-fascism. For further information see Andro Linklater, An Unhusbanded Life: Charlotte Despard Suffragette, Socialist and Sinn Féiner, Hutchinson, London 1980 & Margaret Mulvihill, Charlotte Despard. A Biography, Pandora, London 1989.

branch of the Independent Labour Party.³⁵ Mabel Hope was Secretary of the Central London Branch of the League and a representative of the Postal Telegraph Clerks' Association. Mary Macarthur was Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League and was the founder and first President of the National Federation of Women Workers which was also formed in 1906. Margaret MacDonald was a member of the Women's Industrial Council until 1910, a body which had been formed in 1894 by Clementina Black, and whose origins went back to the late 1880s and the Women's Trade Union League. Mrs. MacKenzie was a representative of the National Council of the Adult Schools' Association and Edith Rigby, secretary of the Preston WLL, also ran that branch of the WSPU.³⁶

The diverse nature of the concerns these women brought with them into the League promised to locate the Women's Labour League at the centre of socialist feminist struggles and to unite women involved in suffrage and industrial campaigns under the umbrella of the League, just as the Parliamentary Labour Party brought together men from across the labour and socialist spectrum. Yet for much of the period to 1914 the Women's Labour League was unable to occupy such a key position within the feminist movement as a whole. One of the reasons why the League was unable to

³⁵ Mary Gawthorpe, 1881- c.1961, was a school teacher from Leeds. After she had been imprisoned many times for her activities within the Women's Social and Political Union her health broke down completely and she remained an invalid for many years. In 1911 she became one of the founders of the journal The Freewoman which was concerned to expand feminist activities from those narrowly conceived by suffragists. For further information see Olive Banks, Becoming a Feminist. The Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminism. Wheatsheaf Books, Brighton 1986; Sheila Rowbotham, Hidden From History. 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It. Penguin, Harmondsworth 1975; Jane Marcus, ed. The Young Rebecca. Writings of Rebecca West 1911-1917. Virago, London 1983; and Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement (1931). Virago, London 1978.

³⁶ Edith Rigby, 1872-1949, was married to a local doctor in Preston. After her involvement with the WSPU, she became concerned with alternative schooling for children. Because of her support for the WSPU Edith Rigby, along with Mary Gawthorpe and Teresa Billington-Greig, was to shortly resign from the League. Ethel Snowden also resigned because of the League's position on suffrage for women. See Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement. Virago, London 1978. p. 236.

unite the feminist movement lies in Margaret MacDonald's opening words and the dichotomy she introduced between the role of women as homemakers and their struggles for political and economic rights. A second reason concerned both the internal structure of the League and its external structural relationship with the Labour Party. These two reasons, in turn, combined to produce a third reason: the relationship between the League and other socialist feminist groups who were campaigning for women's political and industrial rights. More than any other issue, the question of votes for women highlighted these reasons why the Women's Labour League was not able to unite the feminist movement.

In 1906, a newspaper covering the first conference of the League reported the following discussion:

The first objects of the League, insisted Mrs Pethick Lawrence, should be to improve the general conditions of woman's labour and to obtain for women a direct voice in the making of the laws that regulate woman's work. The League should certainly work for the removal of sex disability. Miss I.O. Ford agreed that the first duty of women was to get the vote...Other speakers followed, and the conference was in the throes of an excited discussion of the rival merits of adult suffrage and of the removal of women's disabilities, when Miss Macarthur appealed to the League not to raise controversial points, but to make the new organisation one in which all sections could combine.³⁷

During the same debate on the suffrage Ethel Snowden³⁸ pointed out the danger of the League's becoming merely a supporter of men's

³⁷ Stockton Herald, June 30 1906. GTC 300a/16. It is interesting to note that none of the above discussion appeared in the pages of the official conference report.

³⁸ Ethel Snowden, 1880-1951, was married to the Labour Party politician Philip Snowden. She was a member of the Independent Labour Party and resigned from the Women's Labour League because of its policy on women's suffrage. Like a number of other socialist feminists who felt that they could not support the Labour Party whilst it maintained a commitment to adult suffrage only, Snowden subsequently became active in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. During the war, Snowden was an active peace campaigner and was one of a number of women who split from the NUWSS and helped to form the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She published two books on feminism and socialism: The Woman Socialist (1907) and The Feminist Movement (c. 1909).

organisations'.³⁹ Snowden's demand was for the League to formulate a clear policy on women's suffrage which was independent of the adult suffrage policy of the Labour Representation Committee and the Labour Party since 1904. Snowden's fears concerning the role of the League were apparently shared by Keir Hardie for, as Sylvia Pankhurst later wrote:

Keir Hardie opposed the formation of this body. He saw in it a rival to the W.S.P.U., moreover he wanted the women to be in the Labour Party and the Socialist societies on equal terms with men. He did not wish them relegated to a special section outside the main current of the movement, expected to help the Labour Party in elections, but powerless to control its policy.⁴⁰

Despite the obvious interest generated by women's suffrage at the opening conference of the League, and despite the fact that its executive committee contained members who were active in other suffrage organisations, Keir Hardie's fears that the League would not be able to affect party policy on this issue proved justified, at least until the years immediately before the outbreak of war in 1914.

It was to avoid this 'controversial' point with regard to women's suffrage that the League agreed at its second conference in 1907 to leave 'the members of the W.L.L. free to agitate the question on whatever lines appear to them best, but reaffirms the necessity for the recognition of the equality of women and men as citizens and the direct Labour representation of women in Parliament and on all local bodies'.⁴¹ 'The life of the League

³⁹ Reported in the Aberdeen Evening Gazette June 26 1906. GTC 300a/16.

⁴⁰ S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, pp. 244-245. Membership of the Labour Party was possible by organisation affiliation only. Individual membership was not possible until 1918 when the Labour Party changed its constitution. Thus in 1910, of the 1,430,539 members who were affiliated to the Labour Party, all but 35,377 were trade unionists. The Women's Labour League, by contrast, comprised a mere 4,000 members. In terms of voting power, then, the League represented an insignificant minority. R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924 p. 1.

⁴¹ Report of the Second Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1907. p. 15. WLL 2.

depended entirely upon this compromise', declared Mary Macarthur.⁴² But this 'compromise' did not prevent some serious splits occurring within the League. Kitty Ralph, the secretary of the Preston Branch, which was one of the oldest branches in the League, reported in 1907 that: 'Just before the conference there was a split in our branch here owing to the formation of a branch of the W.S. & P.U., when the secretary, president and several of the committee resigned leaving a debt of about £3 to be cleared off by the new committee.'⁴³

The immediate impetus behind the split in Preston, which was one of several such splits at this time, was the attitude displayed towards the question of women's suffrage at the 1907 Labour Party conference. When it was proposed that the conference support adult suffrage and urge for the immediate enfranchisement of women on the same basis as men, Harry Quelch of the Social Democratic Federation moved an amendment that 'to extend the franchise on a property qualification to a section only is a retrograde step, and should be opposed'.⁴⁴ His seconder for this amendment was Mabel Hope, a member of the executive committee of the League, who argued: 'Although she admired the women for the pluck and heroism they have shown, she could not help thinking that...they have created a sex antagonism instead of a class antagonism, and it is contrary to the spirit of

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kitty Ralph to Mary Middleton September 29 1907. WLL 1. 39 1. This would be the resignation of Edith Rigby from the League. Ralph did add, however, that Rigby was continuing to offer assistance, which strongly suggests that greater co-operation may have existed at a local level than is evidenced between national bodies. This particular report from Preston is also interesting for its claim that the lectures organised by the previous committee were of too high a level for the women of the area and, as such, the new committee proposed to enlist women by holding musical evenings and the like. This gives us some understanding of the enormous obstacles faced by the League when trying to organise women throughout the country.

⁴⁴ Report of the Seventh Annual Conference of the Labour Party, 1907. p. 61.

Socialism that this should be so.⁴⁵ The amendment was carried by 605,000 votes to 268,000 against. As a result of this action, Selina Cooper resigned from the Nelson branch of the League, of which she was the president and a founder-member, taking with her all the local women. The branch ceased to exist until 1913, following the Labour Party's reversal of its policy on women's suffrage.⁴⁶

Quelch's action, as we saw in the previous chapter, was one strategy adopted by socialist men to negate the claims of women by denying the existence of gender divisions within the working class itself. What was particularly disturbing as far as women like Selina Cooper were concerned was the statement of Mabel Hope, a fellow member of the Women's Labour League. Cooper, and the socialist feminists with whom she was associated in the mill towns around Manchester, based her argument for the immediate enfranchisement of women upon the belief that the specific needs of working-class women would not be addressed whilst they remained without a say in the laws that governed them. In particular, Cooper had a keen sense in which the working class and its erstwhile political representative, the Labour Party, was divided along gender lines. Mabel Hope's words, therefore, represented not merely a betrayal of the spirit of compromise adopted at the 1907 conference of the League, they also served to underline the subordination of the League to the party.

The subordinate position of the League within the Labour Party was further confirmed in 1908. Mrs Willson, the secretary of the Halifax branch of the League found herself being reprimanded twice in 1908 for her

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See Jill Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel. Selina Cooper 1864-1946 Virago, London 1984. pp. 177-178 & p. 213.

continuing support of the Women's Social and Political Union.⁴⁷ At the 1908 League conference Mary Macarthur moved an amendment to the previous suffrage resolution endorsed in 1907 which ended with the important clause, 'subject to loyalty to the Constitution of the League'.⁴⁸ Mrs Willson, as a member of the WSPU, enquired what her position would be if the resolution was carried, to which the chairman replied: 'She could not understand how Mrs Willson could conscientiously belong to both organisations. If members broke the rules of the Union, that was not for the League to deal with, but they were not going to have the rules of the League broken.'⁴⁹ Obviously this point needed to be clarified because in December of that year Margaret MacDonald told the executive committee that she had received a letter from Mrs Willson: 'who was in some doubt as to whether the branch could remain affiliated to the national organisation and also work in an election on the lines of the W.S.P.U.' Mrs MacDonald was instructed to write back to her, 'pointing out that a loyal member of the League could not go into an election where a Labour man was running unless to take an affirmative part'.⁵⁰

The spirit of compromise which the League attempted to promote with regard to women's suffrage represented not so much a clear statement of policy as a desire to side-step the issue for fear that it would not only split

⁴⁷ The reason for the harsh treatment of Mrs Willson may have been the fact that both Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst resigned from the ILP in 1907 and from this time onwards there was a clear shift in policy from the WSPU which included campaigning against all Government candidates, including those sympathetic to the cause. Such a policy could not be supported by the League because the Labour Party in parliament was dependent upon the support of the Liberals for any measures it wanted enacted.

⁴⁸ Report of the Third Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1908, p. 23. WLL 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* p. 24.

⁵⁰ Executive Committee Minute Book. December 11 1908. WLL 1. 165/2/12-13. This stronger stance against dissidents within the League may also have been a result of the fact that in March 1908 the Labour Party accepted the affiliation of the League. See letter from J. Ramsay MacDonald to Mary Middleton. March 21, 1908. WLL 1. 77.

the League but also endanger its relationship with the Labour Party. Nevertheless, as the action taken by the executive committee in reprimanding Mrs Willson demonstrated, the League did not leave the issue of the suffrage to each member's conscience, especially where members' activities conflicted with the official League policy of full support for Labour candidates at elections.⁵¹ The position of the League was clouded by the fact that, whilst it ostensibly allowed members to campaign for either a limited or a universal suffrage as they saw fit, some of its most prominent and powerful members were committed to supporting full adult suffrage and publicly proclaimed such a commitment. Indeed, in 1909, the executive committee, which seems to have operated almost as a separate branch in itself, affiliated to the People's Suffrage Federation.⁵² Those members of the League who were also on the General Committee of the People's Suffrage Federation included Mary Middleton,⁵³ Ada Salter,⁵⁴ Lisabeth Simm⁵⁵ and Mary Ward, whilst Mary Macarthur was, along with Margaret Llewelyn Davies of the Women's Co-operative Guild, an honorary

⁵¹ Report of the First Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1906, p. 4. WLL 2.

⁵² Executive Committee Minute Book. December 3 1909. WLL 1. 165/ 2/57.

⁵³ Mary Middleton, 1871-1911, was married to the assistant-secretary of the Labour Party, J. S. Middleton. She became the secretary of the League late in 1906 following the resignation of Mary Fenton Macpherson of the Railway Women's Guild. See the Biographical Notes in L. Middleton, ed., Women in the Labour Movement.

⁵⁴ Ada Salter was a quaker and pacifist who was married to Dr. Alfred Salter, Labour M.P. for Bermondsey in the 1920s. See *ibid*.

⁵⁵ Lisabeth Simm was an organiser for the Women's Labour League in the north-east of England.

secretary of the Federation.⁵⁶ The League's representative within the Adult Suffrage Society was Margaret Bondfield,⁵⁷ who was the president of that organisation.⁵⁸

The strong commitment to adult suffrage by the leaders of the League reflected more than an adherence to a belief in formal equality within the labour movement. It also highlighted the difficulties faced by the WLL in the light of two particular factors. Firstly, several of its leaders, such as Margaret MacDonald, Mary Middleton and Mary Macarthur, were married to leading Labour Party politicians. They were not, therefore, in a position to publicly oppose official party policy even if they had wished to do so.⁵⁹ Secondly, the WSPU posed a considerable threat to the League not merely

⁵⁶ The People's Suffrage Federation was formed in 1909 with the aim of obtaining the vote 'for every man and woman, on a short residential qualification'. Its affiliated organisations included a number of trade unions, including the National Federation of Women Workers; the Central Committee of the Women's Co-operative Guild and a number of its local branches; various Women's Liberal Associations throughout the country; the Executive Committee of the Women's Labour League and eighteen of its local branches; the Women's Railway Guild; a number of branches of the Independent Labour Party and various Trades Councils. In addition, the Parliamentary Labour Party passed a resolution of sympathy with the object of the Federation in August 1909. GTC 604/64.

⁵⁷ Margaret Bondfield, 1873-1953, was one of eleven children born to a Somerset lace maker. She spent most of her early working life either working as a shop assistant or working for the union. She moved to London in 1894 where, through the offices of the Women's Industrial Council, she became acquainted with Margaret MacDonald. She became at first a member of the Social Democratic Federation, moving later to the Independent Labour Party, and finally ending up with the Fabian Society. Through her union work, Bondfield also became acquainted with Gertrude Tuckwell and Mary Macarthur. She became an MP. In 1923 and became parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Labour in the minority Labour Government of 1924. In 1929, when Labour obtained power again, Bondfield achieved the distinction of becoming the first woman Cabinet Minister, as Minister for Labour. See her entry in Joyce M Bellamy & John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 2. Macmillan, London 1974. pp. 39-45.

⁵⁸ The Adult Suffrage Society was formed in 1907.

⁵⁹ However, it should be remembered that Ethel Snowden was also married to a Labour MP. and in this instance her views on women's suffrage appear to have predominated in the relationship. Snowden was to resign also from the ILP specifically because Mary Macarthur was organising the Adult Suffrage Society which Snowden declared was contrary to the programme of the ILP. The ILP supported Macarthur in this matter. See the letters written by Snowden Archives of the Independent Labour Party. FJC September 19, 1909. 1909/389 & October 7, 1909. 1909/434.

because it took members away and split branches at the very moment when the League was trying to establish itself but also because it served to confuse the two organisations in people's minds.⁶⁰ However, there often existed a gulf between the London headquarters of feminist and socialist organisations and their provincial branches. Thus although the executive committee had affiliated to the People's Suffrage Federation in 1909 when a resolution to the effect that the national Women's Labour League, as opposed to individual branches, should also affiliate was put to delegates it was defeated by a large majority. Annot Robinson, an ILP activist from Manchester thought that there would be 'considerable friction if we passed this resolution', and Mrs. Taylor of Wood Green said that her branch had already affiliated and they 'were losing members through doing so'.⁶¹ The defeat of this resolution occurred despite the fact that it had, in the words of Mary Ward, 'received the direct commendation of the Labour Party'.⁶² Actions such as this showed that the branches were not always subordinate to either the wishes of the executive committee or those of the Labour Party as a whole.

⁶⁰ In 1907 John Hodge, M.P. for Preston and a representative of the British Steel Smelters' Mill Iron and Tinplate Workers' Association, was asked to be a fraternal delegate for the Labour Party at the forthcoming WLL conference. At first he was reluctant to do so and eventually accepted saying that he 'was not quite sure as to whether it was the other crowd or not'. See the exchange of letters between J.S. Middleton and Hodge. Archives of the British Labour Party. Series III. General Correspondence and Political Records Part II. LPGC 15/283-285. Lisabeth Simm wrote to Mary Middleton that because the Throckley branch had received publicity over the provision of a recreation ground 'enquiries are being made about the wonderful W.L.L. & their relation to the suffragettes!!!'. June 11, 1909. WLL I. 81.

⁶¹ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League 1910. p. 27. WLL 2. Annot Robinson, ?- 1925, was until 1909 an active member of the WSPU. She later turned to the NUWSS because of the attitude of the WSPU towards the Labour Party. Annot Robinson was a close friend of Selina Cooper and joined her as an organiser for the NUWSS. For much of her married life she struggled to raise her daughters on whatever money she could earn through her socialist feminist connections as her husband Sam, also a member of the ILP, was an alcoholic. For further information see J. Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel.

⁶² Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League 1910. p. 26. WLL 2.

At the 1910 Conference of the League, following the failure of the first Conciliation Bill and the announced intention of the Liberal government to introduce a Reform Bill which might, as an amendment, include women's suffrage, an attempt was made to take a more positive position with regard to votes for women and a resolution was passed which stated:

Believing that the active participation of women in the work of Government is in the best interests of the nation, and in view of the Reform Bill promised by the Government, this Conference demands that the inclusion of women shall not be left to the chances of an amendment, but that it shall become a vital part of the Government measure; and further declares that any attempt to exclude women should be met by the uncompromising opposition of organised Labour to the whole Bill.⁶³

If this resolution had been accepted by the Labour Party it would have committed that body to supporting a limited measure of female enfranchisement and, moreover, actively opposing any measure to introduce universal male suffrage alone. However, when it came to be discussed at the Labour Party Conference in 1910,⁶⁴ Margaret Bondfield, as the League's delegate, agreed with Arthur Henderson's objection to the last four words of the resolution - 'to the whole Bill' - on the grounds that she felt his objection to be 'reasonable'.⁶⁵ Mary Macarthur gave her support by seconding

⁶³ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1910, pp. 13-14. W.L. 2.

⁶⁴ The League's Conferences were held about a week before the Annual Conferences of the Labour Party.

⁶⁵ Margaret Bondfield, 'Report of Delegate to Labour Party Conference'. Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1910. p. 44. W.L. 2. Bondfield later admitted that because of her actions she 'had to face a storm of criticism from certain members of the Executive Committee'. Margaret Bondfield, A Life's Work. Hutchinson, London n.d. p. 86. Arthur Henderson, 1863-1935, was an ex-Liberal trade unionist turned Labour Party politician. In 1908 he succeeded Keir Hardie as parliamentary chairman of the Party. In 1911, when Ramsay MacDonald became the leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, Henderson was installed as General Secretary. He was one of the prime movers behind the new constitution adopted by the Party in 1918. See his entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography. Vol. 1. Macmillan, London 1972. pp. 161-167.

the resolution as amended. By this action the League's resolution was rendered completely meaningless.

The issue of the suffrage for women involved in the League was finally resolved in 1912. It was reported at the annual conference that the League 'had sent a delegate to the recently formed Women's Suffrage Joint Committee of M.P.s, and Societies in favour of the grant of the franchise on broad and democratic lines...and it is agreed that each Society may interpret broad and democratic as it thinks best'.⁶⁶ In support of this new move the League called upon the Labour Party 'to make it clear that they will not accept any measure for extending the franchise which does not include its extension to women'.⁶⁷ The Labour Party, acting upon this initiative from the League, then voted at its own conference to oppose any proposed reform measure that did not include women's suffrage.⁶⁸ In November 1912 Marion Phillips, now secretary of the League following the deaths of Mary Middleton and Margaret MacDonald in 1911, sent a letter to all branches of the Labour Party, the ILP and local Trades and Labour Councils in which she urged: 'The exclusion of all women, simply as women, from the franchise is a continual weakness to the women's side of our movement. Adult Suffragists, though we all are, we fear that the grant of manhood suffrage and the refusal of votes for women would at this stage in our agitation give a set back to the women's cause which it would take years to retrieve.'⁶⁹ As a result of

⁶⁶ Report of the Seventh Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League 1912 p. 9. WLL 2. For a description of this Committee see Sandra Stanley Holton, Feminism and Democracy, Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986. pp. 89-91.

⁶⁷ Report of the Seventh Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League. 1912. p. 9. WLL 2.

⁶⁸ Robert Smillie represented the miners' opposition to this move but the League's amendment was carried by 919,000 votes to 686,000. See the report by Katharine Bruce Glasier in The League Leaflet No. 14, February 1912. p. 2. WLL 2.

⁶⁹ Reprinted in The League Leaflet No. 24, December 1912. p. 10. WLL 2.

these actions the League was able to take the initiative on this important question, rather than having to submit to the ritual adult suffrage amendments passed at party conferences.

The debate on women's suffrage was dominant in the Women's Labour League and threatened to tear the League apart even as it was being formed. It had been a bitter debate, causing deep disillusionment among some socialist feminists like Selina Cooper with the Labour Party. If Sylvia Pankhurst was correct in her assertion that the League had initially been formed specifically to counter the growing attraction of the Women's Social and Political Union, then it was a manoeuvre which almost failed and served to heighten, rather than diminish, the divisions between socialist feminists and between feminists. The Women's Labour League itself had attempted to minimise the divisions caused by the suffrage debate by allowing its members the freedom to decide for themselves which particular suffrage proposition to support. But the combination of the executive committee's affiliation to the People's Suffrage Federation, the Labour Party's rejection of any measure other than complete adult suffrage, and the close personal relationships between the leaders of the League and the leaders of the Labour Party overrode that freedom of choice until it became clear to both that women's suffrage was a vital key to the creation of a democratic society.

The early attitude of the Labour Party to women's suffrage, and by extension also that of the League, was in part due to its own weak position within parliament as a minority group dependent upon Liberal goodwill for electoral success and in part due also to the difficulties it faced in trying to hold together a disparate group of Labour politicians. Nevertheless, as reports from local branches revealed, often the greatest opposition the local League branches had to face simply when trying to organise women came from within the ranks of the working class and the Labour Party itself.

Lisabeth Simm, the League representative from Gosforth, hinted at the problems faced by the branches when she wrote to Mary Middleton: 'The great answer up here is "women's place is the home." Women have heard it so often that they believe it now.'⁷⁰ Grace Lloyd, the Secretary of the Jarrow branch, wrote in her report to the League in 1907: 'We desire to add our warmest thanks to Mrs. Ramsay MacDonald for a visit during the contest [the Board of Guardians elections], her most helpful address tending largely to break down the prejudice which prevails even in our own ranks.'⁷¹ The Leicester Branch in its report to the League also wrote of the difficulties women faced in relation to the Labour Party: 'We have also affiliated with the local Labour Party'⁷² and nominated a woman for the Town Council but the Labour Party would not accept it.'⁷³

From the time that it was formed, then, the Women's Labour League became enmeshed in the feminist and socialist problematics, recast in the light of its structural and ideological relationship to the Labour Party. It urged women to fight for their rights as men had done yet sought to distance

⁷⁰ Lisabeth Simm to Mary Middleton. June 11, 1908. WLL 1. 81. Simm spent much of her time trying to organise among the mining communities of the North-East. Given the long-standing adherence of the miners to the Liberal Party and the fact that the isolation of those communities meant that there was little or no paid work for women one can understand just how much of an uphill struggle she faced.

⁷¹ Report of the Jarrow Branch of the Women's Labour League 1907. WLL 1. 46 I & II.

⁷² I believe the body referred to here is the Independent Labour Party and not the Labour Party. A certain amount of confusion arises because the term 'Labour Party' was used interchangeably for both bodies. It is possible, however, that local branches of the League were affiliated to local branches of the Labour Party prior to the Labour Party accepting the affiliation of the Women's Labour League as a national body in 1908.

⁷³ Edith Barnes, Honorary Secretary of the Leicester Branch to Mary Middleton 1907. WLL 1. 67 I & II. By 1913, and probably before this date, Edith Barnes was a member of the Leicester Branch of the WSPU. See letter written to Keir Hardie and signed by a number of members from the WSPU dated January 28, 1913. Archives of the Independent Labour Party. FJC. 1913/26 i-iv. The existence of such a strong branch of the WSPU in Leicester, MacDonald's own constituency from 1906 to 1918, may perhaps go some way towards explaining his not inconsiderable hostility to the WSPU and his antipathy to women's suffrage generally.

itself from other socialist feminist groups not allied to the Labour Party who were doing precisely that. It constantly stressed that the Labour Party had always stood for 'the equal rights and duties of women and men as citizens',⁷⁴ yet, as letters from its members revealed, it had to withstand considerable hostility from men within the party to its existence. Indeed, two years elapsed before the Labour Party accepted its application for affiliate status and even after 1908 it remained a minority voice within the party, just as the party was itself a minority voice within parliament.⁷⁵ The women's suffrage campaign thus struck at the heart of these problematics and exposed the difficulties socialist feminists encountered when trying to define a political space for women within the confines of a larger organisation which gave priority to class and which often ill-disguised a deeper gender antagonism.

It was to overcome some of these points of tension that Mary Macarthur declared that the aim of the League was:

to bring the mother spirit into politics, and she believed that they were doing that more and more. It was often said that women were conservative, and she thought that that was quite true. It was only because they were conservative that they were members of the Women's Labour League. They wanted to conserve all that was best in our national life, and it was only through their League and the Labour Party that they could do it...These were fundamental aspirations, and they were faced with the very difficult task of translating them into practical legislative proposals. The moment they began to do this they were brought face to face with the theorists on the one hand and the faddists on the other...So they of the League had to strike a happy medium in their legislative proposals.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Why Women Want a Labour League. Women's Labour League Leaflets. No. 1. 1906. Archives of the British Labour Party. Pamphlets and Leaflets 1900-1926. Series II Part 1. 06/27.

⁷⁵ Margaret MacDonald, Women and the Labour Party. SLTB Part 4, 1908-1911. 1909/33. p. 5.

⁷⁶ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League. 1910 pp. 10-11. WLL 2.

Macarthur concluded her address by emphasising that:

Their movement was necessarily against any spirit of sex antagonism and sex war. They realised that industrial evils afflicted men and women alike, that they had got to work out their industrial salvation together, and that they must do it hand in hand. "Women's cause...is man's. They rise or fall together."⁷⁷

Macarthur gave priority to three elements in her speech - the mother spirit, a happy medium in legislative proposals, and an opposition to sex antagonism - which were designed to reconcile the aims of the League with those of the Party whilst, at the same time, promoting a feminism which was significantly different from that expounded by other feminists who were critical of the androcentric bias of the Labour Party.⁷⁸ All three of these elements were inter-related, and all were conditioned by the relationship between the League and the Labour Party.

The 'happy medium' championed by Macarthur raised critical questions for the relationship between feminism and socialism within the context of the Labour Party. Of particular importance is the sense in which this middle course contained both reactionary and liberatory potentials, in terms of women's consciousness and subjectivity. It did not have to mean adopting the politics of compromise, nor did it necessarily mean acquiescing in the negative portrayal of womanhood implicit in the thought of those who denied women's rights through an espousal of gendered ideology which masked gender oppression by emphasising class solidarity. Indeed, it is possible to see in this the expression of a desire to transcend the polarities inherent within notions of difference and equality, independence and alliance.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 12-13.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Christabel Pankhurst's article 'Women and the Independent Labour Party'. *ILP News*. Vol. VII. No. 7. August 1903. BLHE 1880-1900.

Mary Macarthur's words concerning the need to 'strike a happy medium' between 'theorists' and 'faddists' referred specifically to protective legislation for women workers. Like the right to vote, the right to work was a central issue for socialist feminists. However, the issue of women workers was not merely central for socialist feminists, it also represented an issue where the needs of women, those of the working class generally and those of the state intersected. That this was a contentious issue is revealed by Macarthur's description of two key elements in the debate - theorists and faddists. 'Theorists' was a reference to those feminist and socialist feminist groups who opposed protective legislation on the grounds that it was gender specific and was, moreover, framed without the consent of women workers themselves.⁷⁹ 'Faddists', on the other hand, was a reference to those who would ban women's labour - particularly married women's labour - outside the home altogether.⁸⁰ The role of the Women's Labour League, as Macarthur saw it, was to press for legislative enactments which could overcome the tensions between these two polarised positions.

Nevertheless, the recourse to nature in the form of an essentialist motherhood acted as a powerful constraint upon the liberatory potential of this 'happy medium'. An essentialist notion of motherhood was stressed within the context of social investigation and reform. This did not transcend the dichotomies central to the liberal Enlightenment tradition - public/private; nature/society - rather, it re-defined them in the light of the development of collectivism. As the Women's Labour League Leaflet No. 6, entitled Labour Women as Guardians of the Poor, stated:

⁷⁹ This was a clear reference to feminist groups such as the NUWSS and the WSPU, both of which opposed protective legislation. It was also a reference to those socialist feminists in Manchester and Salford such as the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers' Committee.

⁸⁰ The reference here is to people such as John Burns.

The work of the Poor Law Guardians is like housekeeping for a very big and difficult family, and we want women's help to run this publicly managed household, just as much as to arrange for their own homes. All sorts of questions arise which a woman knows more about, or can tackle better than a man.⁸¹

It was not solely the work of Poor Law Guardians which the League saw as housekeeping writ large, this was to be the fundamental rationale behind all their calls for women to enter public life. All welfare issues, ranging from school meals to the establishment of pit-head baths for miners, could be encompassed by this view. 55

By advocating public participation for women on the basis of motherhood as one means of overcoming charges of stirring up 'sex antagonism' the League sought to steer a path between those who, like Harry Quelch, saw in every struggle for women's rights an attempt to divide the working class on 50 gender lines, and the women of the Women's Social and Political Union whose increasing militancy was disturbing conventional views of 'womanly' behaviour. As far as the League was concerned there were pragmatic reasons behind this also. By stressing the role of women as wives and mothers the League had a two-fold purpose. It could reach an 55 accommodation with their male counterparts within the Labour Party and at the same time argue for the urgent participation of women in public life without demanding the destruction of those roles; indeed, such participation was predicated upon them. Whilst such arguments did not challenge the dominant ideology of women as wives and mothers, nevertheless they represented a significant re-definition of the nature of the political. 65 "Women's" issues thereby became the subject of political debate and, importantly, the question of what constituted women's issues was greatly expanded. By the use of these arguments the League was involved in the creation of a new concept of the citizen that included the active 65

⁸¹ Women as Guardians of the Poor, Women's Labour League Leaflet No. 6. n.d. c.1906. GTC 601/66.

participation of working-class women in shaping those laws and institutions which directly impinged on their lives. But the ideology of motherhood developed by the Women's Labour League was itself the product of struggle. One of the areas where this struggle became visible was that of married women's labour and the accompanying question of endowment of motherhood.

The issue of married women's work outside the home became a matter of political concern following the Boer War when so many army recruits were found to be malnourished.⁸² Rather than looking at the underlying causes of malnutrition and ill-health, such as low wages, inadequate housing and sanitation, politicians and public health experts placed the blame upon mothers for poor child care and particularly upon mothers who worked outside the home. As Dr. R. King Browne, the Medical Officer of Health for Bermondsey in London stated at a conference organised by the League in 1912: 'In poor districts, like Bermondsey, they found it was only when the mothers found it necessary to leave home to go to work that the children began to fall away. A great deal of the neglect of children was due to ignorance.'⁸³

The anxiety produced as a result of the Boer War and the findings of the surveys carried out by Charles Booth in London and Seebohm Rowntree in York⁸⁴ affected all shades of political opinion from conservatives to

⁸² According to Anna Davin, in 1899 330 out of every 1000 volunteers for the Boer War were rejected on the grounds of physical fitness. In 1900 the numbers rejected were 280 out of every 1000. This suggested not so much an improvement in health as a reduction in the standards set. A. Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood'. p. 15.

⁸³ The Needs of Little Children. Report of a Conference on the Care of Babies and Young Children. Women's Labour League. Central London Branch. 1912. pp. 9-10. Archives of the British Labour Party. Pamphlets and Leaflets 1900-1926. Series 2 Part 1. 12/27.

⁸⁴ Both Booth in his work, Life and Labour of the People in London (1889-1903), and Rowntree in his work, Poverty: A Study of Town Life (1901), reported that about 30% of the people they surveyed were living below the poverty line.

socialists and, although their reasons differed, all were united in a call for state intervention. Imperialists could argue that the British Empire would not survive without a strong and healthy defence force. Eugenicists, armed with the statistics supplied by Booth and Rowntree, claimed that the weakest members of the race were also those amongst whom the birth rate was highest, thereby leading to a degeneration of the British race. Many socialists and members of the labour movement generally saw state intervention as the only way to improve the circumstances of the working class and for some, in particular trade unionists, a ban on married women's labour could achieve a two-fold purpose.⁸⁵ Firstly, it could lead to the establishment of a family wage and a consequent improvement in home life.⁸⁶ And, secondly, it could lead to the removal of female competition for jobs and the undercutting of wages by employers. Whatever the political agenda of these diverse groups, the focus of their attention was upon women as mothers.⁸⁷ As John Burns, the President of the Local Government Board in the Liberal Government, said in 1906 at the first National Conference of Infant Mortality:

At the bottom of infant mortality, high or low, is good or bad motherhood. Give us good motherhood, and good pre-natal conditions, and I have no despair for the future of this or any other country.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ It needs to be stressed here that although I am talking about the period from 1906 to 1914, discussions of social welfare had been taking place within socialist societies and the union movement since the 1880s. For an analysis of socialist and union attitudes see P. Thane, 'The Working Class and State 'Welfare' in Britain, 1880-1914.' pp. 880-886.

⁸⁶ For an analysis of the concept of the family wage see Michele Barrett & Mary McIntosh, 'The 'Family Wage': Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists' Capital & Class 11, Summer 1980. pp. 51-72.

⁸⁷ For an analysis of the connections between maternalism, imperialism and eugenics see Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800 Longman, London 1981. pp. 122-140.

⁸⁸ Quoted by Sally Alexander, Introduction, in Maud Pember Reeves, ed., Round About A Pound A Week. (1913). Virago, London 1979. p. x.

The Women's Labour League therefore had to confront all these arguments when it attempted to formulate a socialist feminist definition of motherhood on the basis of social welfare reforms.

Opening the debate within the League on married women's work and the endowment of motherhood, Katharine Bruce Glasier declared:

A woman who has a home to make should not be compelled to work outside it from economic necessity, and the question is, should State Maintenance of Mothers be the alternative? She would say rather the State insistence on the rights and duties of fatherhood with State maintenance for necessitous mothers. She would even be inclined to prohibit married women's work, because for one thing she believed that the evils of child mortality and women's ill health was greatest in factory towns where wages were highest.⁸⁹

In Glasier's view, motherhood was a function of benefit for the state and should therefore be protected.

The highest work a man and woman could do for Society was to build a new home, and the more fully developed and free our men and women were the nobler homes they would build. She agreed with St. Paul that the man who, given opportunity, did not provide the means for his household was worse than an infidel. On the other hand the woman who failed to fulfil her duties as wife and mother was dishonest.⁹⁰

Katharine Bruce Glasier perceived the family as the moral basis of the nation. By making the family healthier, cleaner and safer, she argued, the moral and physical health of the nation would in turn be improved. Her conception of social change was therefore foregrounded in the family. But rather than seeing the family as a social construct affected by social, cultural and economic factors, she presented the family as an ahistorical absolute wherein women and children remained in a state of perpetual dependence upon men and, in their absence, the state.

⁸⁹ Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1909, pp. 28-29. WLL 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid* p.28.

Dr. Ethel Bentham⁹¹ responded to Katharine Bruce Glasier's remarks by arguing that prohibiting married women from working would be 'a leap in the dark and might be dangerous'. And she countered the belief that married women's work led to high infant mortality with the fact that: 'Statistics could be quoted on both sides...In towns like Sunderland where there was little or no women's labour infant mortality was very high.'⁹² Other members of the League objected to both the prohibition of married women's labour and the idea of endowment of motherhood on the grounds that it assumed that all women were naturally fitted for marriage and motherhood. Miss Ward: 'protested against a woman looking upon marriage as a means of distraining on a man's wages for the rest of her life', and she went on to reject the biological determinism inherent in the view that women should only be wives and mothers by objecting to 'the assumption that women were born cooks. In her experience she generally found that men made the best cooks'.⁹³ Summing up the discussion on this issue, Margaret MacDonald stated that

it was necessary to understand what the terms employed meant. She had not been able to gather from the speeches of those who said they were in favour of the endowment of motherhood what they exactly wanted. It seemed that all they claimed was maintenance to a mother just before and after the birth of a child, which was a comparatively small matter...But if endowment of motherhood meant that a woman was to have a separate income from her husband this proposal needed

⁹¹ Ethel Bentham, 1861-1931, obtained her medical qualifications from Dublin and Brussels and had been a medical practitioner since 1895. She was a member of a number of feminist and socialist organisations including the Labour Party, the Women's Labour League, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party. In 1913 she was elected to Kensington Borough Council and from 1929 to her death in 1931 was the Labour M.P. for Islington. For many years Ethel Bentham shared a house with Marion Phillips of the Women's Labour League. She was distantly related to Jeremy Bentham, the leader of the Utilitarians. See her entry in Joyce M. Bellamy & John Saville, eds., Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 4. Macmillan, London 1977. pp. 18-20.

⁹² Report of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League. 1909. p. 29. WLL 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

very careful thought and the speaker did not think it a practicable suggestion. It might tend to lower the standard wage for men, since at present this was calculated in the necessity for maintaining a wife and family.⁹⁴

The four voices raised in this debate demonstrated that in 1909 there were considerable divisions within the League over definitions of womanhood and its attempt to formulate a socialist feminist strategy on the basis of motherhood. Clearly not all members of the League shared the negative portrayal of women implicit in the assumption that they were in a state of dependence upon men. Nevertheless, as the statements by Glasier and MacDonald revealed, arguments both for and against endowment of motherhood were foregrounded in women's position within the family. Glasier's emphasis was upon the duties of mothers and fathers as citizens to the state. This was not so much an argument for state interference in the family as an argument for state protection of the sexual division of labour within the family. The language of collectivism was thus linked to gendered ideology to provide a new definition of motherhood which promoted it as a citizen's social duty to the collectivist state. Margaret MacDonald, on the other hand, opposed the concept of endowment of motherhood on the basis that it would undermine the position of men as the major breadwinners within the family by reducing their wages. Although Glasier and MacDonald disagreed over the question of endowment their arguments reflected a more general concern with motherhood across the political spectrum which coalesced around protective legislation, endowment of motherhood and married women's labour within the paid workforce.

By 1910, the two arguments presented by Glasier and MacDonald were brought together by Margaret Bondfield, herself a trade unionist, in her proposal that women should not be employed until six months after

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 29-30.

childbirth and that legislation be enacted to provide maintenance during this period.

Many women do not desire to go out but it is the economic cause that faces them. We must consider in this matter the right of the woman, the right of the child, and the right of the man. If we keep the woman at home for race good, the State must see that she is maintained in a state of physical health and efficiency. It is a race question not an individual one. While we agree with protective legislation we must insist on the simultaneous enactment of a Bill to provide maintenance.⁹⁵

By advocating state payment for women who undertook motherhood, Bondfield was thus able to promote the concept of a reciprocal relationship between state and citizen; for if women were to bear healthy children for the good of the British race then the state had an obligation to see that it was made possible by compensating women financially for loss of earnings. In other words, Bondfield argued, women had a right to economic independence and it was the duty of the state to see that this was achieved.

The language of motherhood, as the above debates illustrate, was couched in terms of nationalist and imperial efficiency. Moreover, whilst such 'nationalist' language was ostensibly gender and class neutral, it was the working-class woman who became the specific subject of investigation. The language of empire and nationalism, as Gareth Stedman Jones' has argued, entered working-class popular culture during the late Victorian period.⁹⁶ Such language had also, therefore, entered the 'common sense' of the working class. Like those reformers of an earlier period, the Evangelicals, social reformers of the first decade of the twentieth century identified the family as the primary site for the formation and transformation of consciousness and subjectivity. But whereas the

⁹⁵ Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1910, p. 21. WLL 2.

⁹⁶ Gareth Stedman Jones, Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983, pp. 230-238.

Evangelicals had identified women as wives within the family as the key agents in their social revolution, the social reformers of the first decade of the twentieth century, who were concerned less with the threat of revolution from abroad and the reformation of morality than with British imperial and economic decline, identified women as mothers within the family as the key agents in their social revolution.

The success of the Evangelical project was such that the concept of gender difference mediated through a social vision constructed on the basis of a series of dichotomies entered the socialist feminist movement of the 1820s to the 1840s. The language of motherhood drew upon this earlier concept of gender difference but, in the social, political and economic context of the early twentieth century, a transformation was effected whereby the individual's obeisance to the moral authority of God became the citizen's duty to the collective good of the community and the state. It was at this point that a conjunction occurred between trade unionists and socialists within the Labour Party. The twenty-nine Labour M.Ps elected to Parliament in 1906 shared few basic principles beyond a commitment to labour representation. However, the ideology of motherhood transcended the differences between them by asserting the 'labourist' tradition of the strength and independence of the male worker - which was based upon the exclusion of women from craft unions, the fight for the extension of protective legislation for women and the concomitant struggle for the family wage - alongside the socialist vision of the collectivist state. Thus, John Bruce Glasier declared: 'In the Socialism of the family the rule of individualism is void.'⁹⁷ And Ramsay MacDonald asserted that 'the Socialist and the Labour movement generally should make it quite clear that the social unit that has got to be protected is not the individual man and the

⁹⁷ J. Bruce Glasier, The Meaning of Socialism. (1919). Independent Labour Party, London 1925. p. 106.

individual woman, but the family'.⁹⁸ Such views were not, however, confined to those like Glasier and MacDonald who were antipathetic towards feminist aspirations. Indeed, Keir Hardie, one of the most ardent supporters of women's suffrage within both the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party, stated: 'He was no believer in substitutes - he did not believe in any substitute for the child's mother, nor did he believe in the gymnasium as a substitute for a forest as the training ground of the normal youngster.'⁹⁹

If language may be understood as a barometer of consciousness then the ideology of motherhood espoused by reformers of all hues must be seen as, above all, a struggle within consciousness. The division introduced by Margaret MacDonald at the founding conference of the Women's Labour League, which received a further impetus from Mary Macarthur when she spoke of theorists and faddists, located that struggle for consciousness within the League itself. By concentrating upon the issue of women's labour outside the home and the concomitant issue of endowment of motherhood, the League forced 'women's' issues onto the political agenda of the Labour Party. But it did so in the context of an ideology and language of motherhood which was being deeply contested within its own ranks as well as by other socialist feminists.

The content of the discussion on the endowment of motherhood and protective legislation showed that all sections of the community - the state, women, working-class men - had a vested interest in motherhood and women's economic independence. However, the level of the debate was conducted primarily with reference to the collective needs of the community and assumed a coincidence of interest between all those

⁹⁸ Edinburgh Evening News October 7 1910. GTC 350/32.

⁹⁹ The Needs of Little Children, 1912, p. 6. Archives of the British Labour Party. Pamphlets and Leaflets 1900-1926. Series 2. Part 1. 12/27.

concerned with motherhood. Ada Nield Chew, a working class member of the League, challenged this assumption by exposing its gender and class specific nature:

[T]here are many earnest people to whom endowment of motherhood seems the only way out of a deplorable state of starving maternity and childhood. But is it, really? Why not demand the same facilities for poor mothers and their children as those enjoyed by women whose husbands are better off? If it is not wrong for a well-to-do woman to spend a few hours away from her child daily, it cannot be wrong for the poor woman. If it is beneficial for the well-to-do children to have specially selected women, and specially selected rooms, gardens, and every other facility for healthy growth, it could not be bad for the children of the poor. Instead, therefore, of giving an individual mother a few shillings a week...why not make beautiful baby gardens, quite near to the homes of the parents, and gather in all the hungry mother-women into this truly blessed State service, and let individual mothers, like individual fathers, follow whatever bent they are fitted for.¹⁰⁰

Not only did Chew argue that the proposal to endow motherhood was specifically aimed at working-class women, she also saw it as an attempt to ensure women's economic dependence by linking it with gendered ideology.

Is there some changeless, immutable law, binding on women who marry, to thereafter spend their days in keeping little houses clean and in cooking little dinners? Why do our ideas of reform nearly always take the form of restricting the liberty of women? Why should the State lay it down, for instance, that if a woman chooses to be a mother, and neither she nor her husband have income sufficient to save her from State interference, that she must give up whatever work she may be efficiently performing, and devote herself in future to housework?...Women *cannot* live individual lives and develop on individual lines whilst nearly all are forced to follow one occupation,

¹⁰⁰ Ada Nield Chew 'Mother-Interest and Child-Training'. The Freewoman, August 22 1912. Reprinted in Doris Nield Chew, ed., Ada Nield Chew. The Life and Writings of a Working Woman, Virago, London 1982. pp. 252-253.

and are dependent for a livelihood either on men or on State endowment.¹⁰¹

Unlike many of her fellow members of the League, Ada Nield Chew did not perceive the state as a disinterested party which necessarily enacted legislation for the ultimate good of all citizens. The universal and ahistorical concept of motherhood is dissolved here by Chew and exposed as a gender and class-specific strategy designed to contain the demands of women for the same individual choices that men claimed for themselves. By so doing, Chew also exposed the ideological and material basis of motherhood when the biological function of childbearing was transmuted into the social function of servicing husbands and children. It was because she denied this intimate relationship between reproduction and cooking and cleaning that Chew advocated the then radical proposal of the provision of collective facilities for childcare and housework. The role of the state, she believed, should not be that of a policeman enforcing inequality by restricting the activities of one group of citizens but, on the contrary, its role should be to bring about greater equality by providing the structural means whereby this could be achieved. Chew thus turned the arguments linking motherhood and the collective good of the community on their head by placing the needs and desires of working-class women at the centre of her proposals.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* pp. 253-255.

In a similar manner, Dora Montefiore¹⁰² of the Social Democratic Party¹⁰³ in a pamphlet entitled Some Words To Socialist Women argued:

Under Socialism, all child-bearing women, who are fulfilling one of the most important functions in the community, in providing it with healthy future citizens, will be maintained by the community, just as everyone else who works for the community will be maintained.¹⁰⁴

The call for the collectivisation of child care and housework represented one socialist feminist strategy for working-class women.¹⁰⁵ It was, however, a relatively rare demand and, moreover, was not necessarily one which accorded with the desires and lived reality of many working-class women. Ellen Ross's study of women's networks in the East End of London before the First World War shows that the women established their own forms of collective help particularly during times of childbirth, illness and unemployment. In this context, 'official' help in the form of charity workers, trained midwives and the like was often resented because it not only disrupted these networks of collective help, it also wrested control and a limited source of livelihood from the hands of local women.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Dora Montefiore, 1851-1934, first became involved in feminism through the suffrage movement in Sydney in the 1890s. By 1893 she had returned from Australia to Britain and became involved in various feminist and socialist organisations including the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Clarion movement, the Social Democratic Federation, the Women's Social and Political Union and the Adult Suffrage Society. In 1921 she was elected to the first executive committee of the newly formed British Communist Party. For further information about Montefiore's public and personal life see Christine Collette, 'Socialism and Scandal'. History Workshop Journal, Issue 23, Spring 1987. pp. 102-111.

¹⁰³ The Social Democratic Federation changed its name to that of the Social Democratic Party in 1907.

¹⁰⁴ Dora Montefiore, Some Words To Socialist Women, 1908. p. 12. SDF Leaflets and Pamphlets 1883-1931. 1908/13.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the different strategies within socialism see C. Rowan, 'Mothers, Vote Labour! The State, the Labour Movement and Working-Class Mothers, 1900-1918.' pp. 62-67.

¹⁰⁶ Ellen Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War 1'. History Workshop Journal, Issue 15, Spring 1983. pp. 4-27 & Ellen Ross, "Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep": Respectability in Pre-World War 1 London Neighborhoods.' International Labor and Working Class History, No. 27, Spring 1985. pp. 39-59.

In contrast to the arguments put forward by the Women's Labour League, Ada Nield Chew and the Social Democratic Federation, the Women's Co-operative Guild, a body which was composed mainly of married working-class women, unequivocally supported endowment of motherhood as one means of securing a form of economic independence for married women. It did so, however, not because it sought to restrict women's choice in life to that of wife and mother alone, but because it recognised that women's economic dependence was one source for the perpetuation of gender inequality.

In plain language, both in law and in popular morality, the wife is still the inferior in the family to the husband. She is first without economic independence, and the law therefore gives the man, whether he be good or bad, a terrible power over her. Partly for this reason, and partly because all sorts of old half-civilised beliefs still cling to the flimsy skirts of our civilisation, the beginning and end of the working woman's life and duty is still regarded by many as the care of the household, the satisfaction of man's desires, and the bearing of children...[T]hese views are widely held, often unconsciously, and are taken advantage of by hundreds of men who are neither good men nor good husbands and that even where there is no deliberate evil or viciousness, these views are responsible for the overwork and physical suffering among women and for that excessive childbearing.¹⁰⁷

By making the connections between gendered ideology, motherhood, economic dependency and the laws of the state, the Women's Co-operative Guild transcended the ideological division between the public and the private spheres and gave priority to the lived experience of working-class women in its campaigns. Where the leaders of the Women's Labour League often spoke in lofty tones about bringing the 'mother spirit' into politics and building 'nobler homes', the Guild instead published a book which chronicled

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Llewelyn Davies, ed., Maternity. Letters From Working Women. (1915). Virago, London 1978. pp. 7-8.

the ill-health, poverty and male brutality which so frequently accompanied motherhood.¹⁰⁸

Despite the fact that both the League and the Guild built their campaigns around married working-class women, three particular factors stand out as constituting the major differences between the two organisations. These factors were; the priority given to women's experiences, their internal organisational framework and their external relationships with their male counterparts. The differences between the two organisations can be seen during the years between 1911 and 1913 when the Guild campaigned vigorously for the inclusion of maternity benefit in the 1911 National Insurance Act and for the payment of that benefit directly to the woman under the Amending Act of 1913. The National Insurance Act incorporated a limited form of health and unemployment insurance for those in paid employment based on a tripartite contributory scheme involving workers, employers and the government. It did not, however, include the dependents of those employed. Interestingly enough, in the light of so much rhetoric about the family wage, the Act did not recognise that one of the arguments in favour of the family wage rested upon the implicit recognition of the unpaid contribution wives made through their domestic labour.¹⁰⁹

This was a point which Margaret Llewelyn Davies, who was General Secretary of the Guild from 1889 to 1921, was not slow to take up; 'by her work as mother and housewife, the woman contributes equally with the man to the upkeep of the home and the family income in reality is as much hers

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the family wage was more of a myth than a reality. There was no law in Britain comparable to the Harvester Judgment of 1907 in Australia which established a basic minimum wage determined by the position of the male breadwinner.

as the man's'.¹¹⁰ The Women's Labour League, along with the Labour Party, did not oppose the introduction of maternity benefit, indeed it campaigned vigorously for its adoption and that of other proposals relating to women, arguing that by omitting benefit to married women 'the Bill gives a direct incentive to women to keep on working for outside employers after marriage'.¹¹¹ To this end the League drew up a series of suggested amendments to the Bill.¹¹² In addition, the League had several members sitting on the Representative Committee, formed by the National Union of Working Women, which was designed to represent the interests of women politically and industrially and to provide the Government with accurate information concerning the plight of women.¹¹³

Where the League did differ from the Guild was over who should receive the payment, the man or the woman. The League opposed payment to the woman, arguing that:

The Labour Party, while anxious that the mother and child should have the full benefit of the money, held that it was a benefit or trust to the family and not the property of one parent, father or mother...We think that by requiring that the husband should give the money to his wife or use it for the benefit of herself and child, the case was safeguarded as far as the law could safeguard it. The House of Commons, however, in a paroxysm of feminist enthusiasm, went further, and added a phrase on the proposal of a good true-blue Conservative, Lord Robert Cecil, that the husband's receipt might only be accepted if authorised by the wife.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ The Times, June 24 1911. Quoted by Jean Gaffin & David Thoms, Caring and Sharing. The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild. Co-operative Union, Manchester 1983. p. 69.

¹¹¹ Margaret MacDonald, 'Women and the Insurance Bill'. The League Leaflet. No. 6, June 1911. p. 1. WLL 2.

¹¹² *Ibid.* pp.5-6.

¹¹³ Marion Phillips, 'The Insurance Bill'. The League Leaflet. No. 7, July 1911. p. 1. WLL 2.

¹¹⁴ The Labour Woman. No. 5. September 1913. p. 75. WLL 2.

The League's reaction to the granting of maternity benefit directly to women and the language it used in opposing such a measure reflected a tendency within the League to denigrate feminism whilst it pursued a close alliance with the Labour Party. Such language is understandable in the light of the problems caused the League by feminist groups such as the WSPU. Nevertheless, it also demonstrated how attempts by the League to formulate a socialist feminist strategy, as opposed to simply a socialist strategy, were handicapped by their susceptibility to the charge of stirring up 'sex antagonism'. Thus, whilst the Guild made women their priority, the League contrarily gave priority to the family.

The Guild was greatly facilitated in its attempts to express directly the needs and desires of working-class women by its own internal structure. The Guild was a democratic organisation, composed of local branches, districts and sections as well as a national committee, all of which were governed in turn by elected committees. In addition, regular conferences were organised at both a sectional and national level.¹¹⁵ This democratic structure had a two-fold advantage: the views of the general membership were carefully safeguarded and large numbers of members could be quickly mobilised behind a particular campaign. It would have been unthinkable for a member of the Guild to do as Margaret Bondfield did at the 1910 annual conference of the Labour Party when she allowed a resolution on women's suffrage put forward by the Women's Labour League to be altered by Arthur Henderson. Similarly, unlike the executive committee of the League, the executive of the Guild did not have the power to override suggestions from the branches.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See J. Gaffin & D. Thoms, *Caring and Sharing*, pp. 34-36.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the General Purposes Committee of the Women's Labour League. July 26 1917. WLL 1. 168/20.

These two factors – the Guild's democratic structure and the link it made between the 'public' and 'private' spheres – were inextricably intertwined, as a London Guildswoman wrote:

The one great difference between the Guild and other bodies of women I have come in contact with, is, may I say, its splendid Democracy. The humblest member can feel that she stands on an absolute equality with the most lofty. Also there is a feeling of comradeship absent in the same degree in other associations. I have heard other women say practically the same thing, and say how it has taught them to think on social questions they at one time would have passed over as outside their capacity. I have seen women join and have seen this change take place. They have certainly become less self-centred and more public-spirited. In words which our members often use, "it has brought us out."¹¹⁷

Thus, whilst the Women's Labour League advocated public participation for women in order to make them better mothers and homemakers, the Guild stressed reforms in the 'domestic' sphere as a pre-condition for political involvement.¹¹⁸ These differing emphases can be explained in part by the quite different relationships the League and the Guild had with their larger male counterpart.

The issue which brought the two organisations together and yet, ironically, exposed the fundamental difference between them in terms of both consciousness and in their relationship to their male counterparts was that of divorce law reform. In 1913, following the report of the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, Margaret Bondfield moved the following resolution at the League's annual conference:

That this Conference welcomes the unanimous declaration of the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes in favour of equality between the sexes and endorses the proposals of the Majority to extend the causes, cheapen the procedure and limit the publicity of divorce; at

¹¹⁷ Margaret Llewelyn Davies, ed., Life As We Have Known It. By Co-operative Women. (1931). Virago, London 1977. p. 141.

¹¹⁸ See C. Rowan, 'Women in the Labour Party'. p. 75.

the same time it regrets that the proposals for lessening the cost of procedure do not yet meet the case of those with small incomes; reaffirms its conviction that the right basis of marriage is mutual affection and respect, and urges that the recommendations of the Commission be so extended as to include the possibility of obtaining a dissolution of marriages in which this basis has been destroyed.¹¹⁹

The resolution was carried by an almost overwhelming majority despite Mrs. Donaldson's reservations that it was 'a step in the direction of free union'.¹²⁰ Paradoxically, the League's support for divorce law reform reinforced, rather than contradicted, some members' belief in the sanctity of the family. As Katharine Bruce Glasier wrote: 'Yet it is exactly because of my belief in the home that after a careful study of the sorrowful evidence brought before the Commission I find I must support the finding of the Majority, and with them declare that the present law as it stands must be reformed.' However, Glasier went on to reaffirm the connections between motherhood, the sanctity of the family, and national efficiency when she declared 'one is bound to remember that the laws of to-day are not made so much for the strong and clean men and women of the race as for the weak and unclean'.¹²¹

The Guild was the only working-class women's organisation which gave evidence to the Royal Commission.¹²² The Guild's support for divorce law reform led to a rift between it and its larger male-dominated organisation, the Co-operative Union, and in 1914, rather than withdraw its submission to the Royal Commission on Divorce, the Guild chose to sacrifice its annual

¹¹⁹ Report of the Eighth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League, 1913, p. 70. WLL 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ The League Leaflet, No. 25, January 1913, p. 7. WLL 2. The League Leaflet was the journal of the Women's Labour League from February 1911 until May 1913 when it changed its name to The Labour Woman.

¹²² Its evidence was subsequently published as Working Women and Divorce, David Nutt, London 1911.

grant of £400 from the Co-operative Union for four years.¹²³ As well as arguing for easier divorce for working women, the Guild also argued that women lawyers should be appointed as they would be able 'to understand the women's point of view'.¹²⁴ Like their campaign on maternity benefit, the Guild stressed that it was women's experiences which were critical in determining its policy and it was prepared to articulate these experiences at the cost of severing relationships with the Co-operative Union.

Although the reasons given by members of the League for their support of divorce law reform did not contradict their belief in the sanctity of the family, this issue did bring condemnation from at least one of the leaders of the Labour Party, which may well have been serious had not the First World War intervened and deflected attention away from divorce. In 1914 Ramsay MacDonald wrote to Katharine Bruce Glasier declaring:

In view of what is happening - of the fact, for instance, that our beloved WLL has passed a resolution declaring that when a husband and wife feel they are not getting on so well as they expected and would like a change, they ought to be able to get a divorce - must we not say some plain things in the Labour Party? This development of the Women's Movement and this capturing of our own by prepared resolutions, is a very great menace...If we had but one member in each branch who thought critically we should be perfectly safe. But our people feel and do not think. There is an interesting tussle going on behind the scenes just now. If our matriarchy friends ever succeed they must get babies classified with drains as they see it...We must try and put things on common sense lines...Keep the WLL straight.¹²⁵

MacDonald's language exposed the difficulties encountered by the Women's Labour League in its relationship with some of the leaders of the Labour

¹²³ See Catherine Webb, The Woman With The Basket. The Story of the Women's Co-operative Guild 1883-1927. Co-operative Wholesale Society's Printing Works, Manchester 1927. pp. 100-101.

¹²⁴ 'Women Co-operators Conference'. The Birmingham Post, June 18 1914. GTC 342/74.

¹²⁵ Katharine Bruce Glasier - James Ramsay MacDonald correspondence, March 13 and April 1 and 2, 1914. Quoted by S. Holton, Feminism and Democracy. p. 55.

Party, as well as a more general fear of the impact that feminist aims would have on the Party.¹²⁶ This fear also reflected a wider concern with the strength of the suffrage movement and the impact this was having on the Labour Party, for in 1912, the Labour Party and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies had established an Election Fighting Fund.¹²⁷ The feminist and socialist problematics were brought into stark relief by his condemnation of the 'matriarchy', for the assertion of women's needs and rights were linked by MacDonald to both women's autonomy and the harmful effects he thought it was having on the Party. His words were an explicit denial of the role of consciousness within the socialist movement through the statement that socialists must think and not feel, and through the dismissal of all reforms which, in his mind, threatened the sanctity of the family.

In reality, as Katharine Glasier's comments indicated, there was little to fear. Like the Women's Trade Union League in its relationship with the Trades Union Congress, the Women's Labour League continued to deprecate feminism, as manifested primarily through the behaviour of the WSPU, as divisive for working women and men.

I think that any part of the women's movement that tends to foment a sex war is shortsighted, and after the vote is won such a faction must surely tail. No Cause can ever succeed in the long run unless it is founded on natural lines and is in accordance with nature. It is natural for there to be affinity between men and women, and for men and women to act together and not in antagonism.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ It should, of course, be made clear that Ramsay MacDonald was not the Labour Party. However, both he and John Bruce Glasier were two of its most experienced members and the fact that they were also married to prominent women within the League did have an impact upon the form of feminism which could be expressed by some League members.

¹²⁷ Sandra Holton has noted that by 1914 some supporters of the Election Fighting Fund in the NUWSS were becoming disillusioned and one factor in this was 'the continuing ambivalence, even hostility, of some Labour leaders, particularly MacDonald, towards the suffragists...' *Feminism and Democracy*, p. 115.

¹²⁸ Ada Salter reported in *The Labour Woman*, No. 11, March 1914, p. 169. WLL 2.

Although the League affirmed its commitment to the family and disavowed sex antagonism, its struggle to articulate an ideology of motherhood showed a contested consciousness which could not accord with that expressed by Ramasay MacDonald. Hampered by structural and ideological constraints, the League nonetheless regarded women as central agents in the struggle for a new society, as this statement illustrates.

It is with the joining of the women's movement and the Labour movement that civilisation moves forward, and it is to the women workers of the world, to the wives and the mothers, to those who have the care of the children of to-day that we must look to tend the flame of freedom, justice and equality on the hearth of the home. For never until that spirit inspires the upbringing of the race, until women take a full share in national life, are citizens as well as wives and mothers, will the unity of the workers be achieved, true democracy attained and life's full possibilities opened to the happy-eyed children of the future.¹²⁹

However, as we have seen, the Women's Labour League was not the only women's organisation concerned with welfare reforms. The Women's Co-operative Guild was also active in this area. The Guild was not strictly speaking a political organisation; it did have links with the Labour Party but these were informal rather than structural. Although, like the League, it was attached to a larger male-dominated organisation, this did not prevent the Guild from maintaining its autonomy on issues where it disagreed with the opinion of the Co-operative Union. In general, though, the Guild acted very much as a pressure group in its campaigns for women's welfare rights. But there did exist another women's political organisation which was also concerned with those issues of importance within the League. This was the Fabian Women's Group which, as its name suggests, was part of the Fabian Society.

¹²⁹ Report of the Executive Committee. Report of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Women's Labour League 1914 p. 32. WLL 2.

The Fabian Women's Group was formed on 14th March 1908 at the London home of Maud Pember Reeves, the wife of the New Zealand Agent General.¹³⁰ Those who comprised the first executive committee were; Miss Berry, Charlotte Bernard Shaw, Dr. O'Brien Harris, Maud Pember Reeves, Miss Murby, Elizabeth Wilson and Charlotte Wilson.¹³¹ If, as Sylvia Pankhurst remarked, the Women's Labour League was formed to counter the activities of the Women's Social and Political Union,¹³² the formation of the Fabian Women's Group was similarly prompted by the suffrage campaign - not to counteract it, however, but to support it. In 1907 several Fabian women succeeded in changing the Basis of the Society (its constitution) to include the call for the establishment of equal citizenship for women and men. By 1908, however, many Fabian women felt that:

at the present stage in the evolution of the Socialist movement, urgent need was arising within and without the Fabian Society for women to draw together and frankly deal with the economic problem from the woman's standpoint. Throughout the civilized world women are in revolt against the position of supplement to male humanity. They are striving for recognition as human beings in the sense in which civilized men so recognize one another. Such recognition is now the privilege of specially fortunate women. In its complete form it carries with it equal rights and responsibilities; socially acknowledged and socially

¹³⁰ Maud Pember Reeves, ? -1953, arrived in England in 1893. She immediately became involved in a number of feminist and socialist organisations including the Women's Trade Union League and the Fabian Society. During the First World War she was appointed Director of the Ministry of Food's Educational and Propaganda Department. See biographical details provided in Maud Pember Reeves, Round About A Pound A Week. (1913). Virago, London 1979.

¹³¹ Charlotte Wilson, 1854-1944, arrived at the Fabian Women's Group via a long and winding tour through a number of different socialist organisations. She was one of the earliest members of the Fabian Society when it was formed in 1884. From the start, though, she exhibited a deep interest in anarchism. This brought her into close contact with William Morris and through him to anarchists like Peter Kropotkin. Wilson left the Fabian Society in 1888 and worked instead for the anarchist journal Freedom until 1901. She appears to have resumed her connections with the Fabian Society around 1907-1908. I have not been able to discover her activities between 1901 and 1907. Following her husband's death, Wilson emigrated to the United States. See Florence Boos, 'William Morris's Socialist Diary'. History Workshop Journal Issue 13, Spring 1982. p. 75.

¹³² S. Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement pp. 244-245.

secured, for men and women as citizens, and in their individual economic relations with each other and with the public administration...We took this point of view in forming the Fabian Women's Group.¹³³

Thus the fight for the vote and women's economic independence became the two main tasks of the Group. It was the pursuit of these twin aims which were to emphasise both the similarities and the differences between the Fabian Women's Group and the Women's Labour League.

The Suffrage Committee¹³⁴ of the Fabian Women's Group was established in October 1911 in order specifically to promote the Conciliation Bill 'from the standpoint of Adult Suffrage', with the proviso that the Committee should 'remain neutral on the subject of militant tactics'.¹³⁵ Prior to the formation of this committee many Group members had taken part in the suffrage agitation and the Report for 1908 proudly announced that eleven Fabian women had been imprisoned for their activities.¹³⁶ The work of the Suffrage Committee consisted primarily in lobbying both Labour and Liberal politicians to ensure their commitment to adult suffrage.¹³⁷ However, unlike the Women's Labour League, the Fabian Women's Group refused to condemn militant tactics¹³⁸ and, moreover, was prepared, in lieu of complete adult suffrage, to support any measure of enfranchisement which included women. It was this policy of neutrality with which Marion

¹³³ Charlotte Wilson, Honorary Secretary, Fabian Women's Group. Extracts from the Report for 1908. Archives of the Fabian Society, Part 1. c/8/A/9.

¹³⁴ The Suffrage Committee was initially known as the Suffrage Section.

¹³⁵ Suffrage Section Minutes. October 19, 1911. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/5.

¹³⁶ Extracts from the Report for 1908. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/9.

¹³⁷ The Fabian Society maintained a much closer relationship with the Liberal Party than did the Labour Party.

¹³⁸ Suffrage Committee Minutes. March 10, 1912. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/5.

Phillips, who was also a member of the League, could not agree and she therefore resigned from the Suffrage Committee in October 1912.¹³⁹ This same policy did, however, attract other women from the League into the ranks of the Fabian Society. Two members of the League, Annot Robinson, who had disagreed with the executive committee of the League over affiliation to the People's Suffrage Federation, and Mrs Harrison Bell, were paid organisers for the Suffrage Committee in the North of England. Ada Nield Chew, who, in 1911, had changed from being a confirmed adult suffragist and instead became prepared to struggle for any measure of enfranchisement,¹⁴⁰ also offered her services as an organiser for the Suffrage Committee in May 1912.¹⁴¹ By adopting this policy with regard to militant suffrage activities, the Fabian Women's Group was able, despite the resignation of Marion Phillips, to avoid the splits which occurred within the Women's Labour League over this issue. Indeed, largely as a result of this

¹³⁹ Suffrage Committee Minutes. October 24, 1912. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/5.

¹⁴⁰ Concerning her conversion, Ada Nield Chew wrote to the Common Cause, the journal of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, explaining: 'I have not changed my opinion as to the immediate value and wisdom of trade unionism for women workers, but it has been forced on my consciousness more and more that whilst women are at a political disadvantage trade unionism is necessarily limited (which does not detract from the value of trade unionism, but emphasises the importance of the vote). But I could not see that anything less than Adult Suffrage would be of any use to the working woman. Now, after many months of anxious thinking, I have come to the conclusion that we cannot get on whilst women have *no* means of even presenting their point of view, and that we shall be at a standstill till this necessary "first step" is taken; and that to be determined to wait until all women can vote is as reactionary and impracticable as to oppose all reform because it does not go as far on our way as we wish it to go.' Quoted in J. Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel, p. 210.

¹⁴¹ Suffrage Committee Minutes. May 11, 1912. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/5. The Committee had to decline her offer because of lack of funds. In 1911, however, both Annot Robinson and Ada Nield Chew became organisers for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

policy, membership of the Group rose twice in 1908, to 159 and then to 208 members.¹⁴²

Although women's suffrage was an important factor in the founding of the Fabian Women's Group, one of its first objects was: 'To consider, study and thoroughly thrash out the real meaning and significance of the economic independence of women in a Socialist community, and, having arrived at definite conclusions, to consider how they apply to practical work in the Socialist movement.'¹⁴³ To this end a Board of Studies sub-committee was established in November 1908. In her preliminary statement concerning the work of the Board of Studies, Charlotte Wilson, the secretary of the Group, wrote:

Every human being, male or female, alike should have equal opportunities of self-development and self-fulfilments, as far as co-operative social efforts can secure them, and social co-operation should be definitely and especially directed to this end...Therefore under Socialism worthy of the name, neither wives nor children can be economically dependent upon husbands or fathers. Each member of the community, - male or female alike, must have recognised social rights to maintenance and education when young, employment and salary when adult, and maintenance and care when ill, disabled or aged. Only the full recognition of this direct economic relation of the individual to the community can ensure the equal freedom of men and women.¹⁴⁴

By focusing explicitly upon women as individuals, the Fabian Women's Group was able to avoid the dichotomy injected by Margaret MacDonald into the Women's Labour League between the perception of women as individuals and the perception of women as wives and mothers. Where the League

¹⁴² Extracts from the Report for 1908. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/9. Another ex-member of the Women's Labour League who became active in the Fabian Society because of this policy was Ethel Snowden.

¹⁴³ Board of Studies. 1908. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/9.

¹⁴⁴ Charlotte Wilson, 'Suggestions for Analysis. Preliminary Statements'. 1908. Board of Studies. Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/9.

balked at reforms which would alter gender relations and the sexual division of labour within the family, the Fabians dismissed this form of socialist feminism as androcentric, devised by men for men. As Maud Pember Reeves stated:

Socialism does not necessarily solve the problem, for we find that a great school of Socialists holds that when security and a good wage shall have been brought within the reach of every head of a family the case of the dependent woman and children in each household can be left to that head to deal with. Such a state of things would amount to Socialism for men, but for most women would involve the subordination of the patriarchal family.¹⁴⁵

In their challenge to the existence of gendered ideology in the socialist movement, which manifested itself in the privilege accorded the male breadwinner within the family and the concomitant emphasis upon women's role as homemakers, the Fabian Women's Group linked their campaigns for women's suffrage and for women's economic independence to the development of the collectivist state. In the process, they forged a new definition of womanhood and manhood which was predicated upon the reciprocal relationship between the citizen and the state: 'Through citizenship is our road to Socialism.'¹⁴⁶ The social relations of citizenship, therefore, were key components in the advent of a social democratic society. By looking critically at the economic position of women within the family the Fabian Women's Group identified motherhood - in its ideological and material sense - as the crucial determinant in women's acquisition of citizenship.

In accordance with its aims as a study group, the Fabian Women's Group organised a series of papers on the economic situation of women. Regarding

¹⁴⁵ Maud Pember Reeves, 'Introductory Paper', in Summary of Eight Papers and Discussions upon the Disabilities of Mothers as Workers Fabian Women's Group 1910. p. 5. Gerritsen Collection No. 832.1.

¹⁴⁶ Extracts from the Report for 1908 Archives of the Fabian Society. Part 1. c/8/A/9.

the position of married women Maud Pember Reeves opened one such discussion by saying:

If a woman's work, for the moment, be motherhood, certainly let her be paid for it, in order that she may suffer no anxiety or stress, and in order that it may be well done. But let her look at such times for her support, not to any individual, but to the State, to which the child is of the utmost value. If the children of the State could rely on the only power strong enough and rich enough to care efficiently for them, there would be in the next generation fewer burdens such as reformatories, hospitals, asylums and gaols for the nation to bear.¹⁴⁷

Fabian socialism has been categorised as the most 'reformist, bureaucratic, anti-democratic and illiberal' variety of all the socialisms in existence during this period because it 'fashioned the ideology of rational efficiency and administrative neutrality which characterized welfarism in practice'.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the Fabian preoccupation with state socialism, in the form of a socialism imposed from above by social experts and administrators, tended to negate class by emphasising a class and gender undifferentiated citizenship. Maud Pember Reeves' unproblematic equation of an identity of interest between women and the state with a reduction in undesirable social institutions certainly conflated the needs of women with those of the state within the discourse of national efficiency.

The links drawn by Pember Reeves were more clearly elucidated in the discussion following her paper when it was asked 'whether the children of unfit parents should be maintained by the community, and also whether the maintenance allowance suggested would not raise the birth-rate to an undesirable extent'.¹⁴⁹ Not all Fabian women, however, agreed with this perspective. Miss Murby dissented from the view that the interests of

¹⁴⁷ Maud Pember Reeves, 'Introductory Paper', in Summary of Eight Papers and Discussions pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁸ S. Hall & B. Schwarz, 'State and Society, 1880-1930', in M. Langan & B. Schwarz, eds., Crises in the British State 1880-1930 p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ Summary of Eight Papers and Discussions p. 7.

women and the state were coterminous by arguing that entrusting maintenance to the state before socialism had been established, that is, before structural changes had been made in the distribution of wealth and in the social relations between the sexes, would lead to women being forced into motherhood by their husbands for monetary gain.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, she argued, they were looking at the problem in the wrong light. Instead of using eugenic theories to support state maintenance for motherhood and thus also supporting a form of economic independence for women she 'looked to the attainment of economic independence by women for the natural solution of the problems of eugenics; the woman's freedom in the selection of a mate being then restored to her, instead of her being driven to marry for maintenance as at present'.¹⁵¹ On the basis of this one discussion alone, then, it would appear to a gross distortion to claim all Fabian thought as 'anti-democratic and illiberal'.

In concluding the papers presented, there was general agreement with the findings of a previous series of papers on women workers which had argued:

It appears to us that false theories and evil social conditions have been, and largely are, responsible for the actual as well as for the presumed weakness of women, and that such weakness affords no valid ground for asserting that women should not, in common with men, take their share as productive workers in creating wealth for society and reaping a personal reward.¹⁵²

Thus the FWG reached the conclusion that women's oppression arose from the complex interaction of ideological and material factors. In the specific case of mothers with young children the same conclusion as above was reached but, due to their special circumstances, the Group concluded that

¹⁵⁰ Summary of Eight Papers and Discussions, p. 7.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 18.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* p. 31. The original quotation is to be found in A Summary of Six Papers and Discussions Upon the Disabilities of Women as Workers, (1909). Reprinted in S. Alexander, ed., Fabian Women's Tracts, pp. 126-127.

what was also needed was, firstly, a maternity allowance from the state to endow women with some measure of economic independence and, secondly, the rational re-organisation of housework using available technology to introduce labour-saving devices within the home which would free women to pursue whatever work they wished.¹⁵³ The crux of both these conclusions was that women had a right to an independent income and, furthermore, they had a right to earn that income outside the home even whilst their children were young. 53

These points were reiterated by Mabel Atkinson in her paper The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement. In it Atkinson argued that in the nineteenth century middle-class women were placed in a condition of extreme dependency - either upon husbands or fathers - and thus their revolt took the form of a protest against sexual oppression. Working-class women, on the other hand, burdened by hard work and low wages joined with men in a class protest against capitalist oppression. Since then, however, the opening of some professions to women had enabled middle-class women to enter the workforce and achieve a limited sense of economic independence. Whilst working-class women had in turn gained some experience of gender antagonism within their own class. In essence, middle-class women were gaining a greater understanding of economic oppression and working-class women were coming to understand gender oppression¹⁵⁴. 53, 52, 36, 49.

Therefore it becomes clear that the only path to the ultimate and most deep lying ends of the feminist movement is through Socialism, and every wise feminist will find herself more and more compelled to

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 31.

¹⁵⁴ Mabel Atkinson, The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement, (1914). Reprinted in S. Alexander, ed., Women's Fabian Tracts, pp. 256-282.

adopt the principles of Socialism. But the wise Socialists must also be feminists.¹⁵⁵

Thus Atkinson recognised that if feminism brought to socialism an understanding of the ideological basis of women's oppression, socialism taught feminists that economic oppression could not be ignored.

It could be argued that both the Women's Labour League and the Fabian Women's Group were actively engaged in this process of trying to reconcile the aims of feminism and socialism. If the Fabian women, like their male colleagues, looked to state intervention as the road to socialism they nevertheless gave that intervention a feminist face by their emphasis upon the political and industrial rights of women. Similarly, the Women's Labour League, who with their male colleagues shared a preoccupation with state protection of the family, also pursued such a preoccupation from a feminist perspective.

The Women's Labour League, as we have seen, developed an ideology of motherhood which urged women to participate in public life in order to protect their role within the family as mothers and homemakers. This, together with their attempt to forge a middle ground in their legislative proposals, represented a specific response to the imposition of welfare reforms from above which attempted to assert the needs of working-class women. The Fabian Women's Group, on the other hand, because of its emphasis on citizenship and the state, formulated an ideology of motherhood which attempted to transcend gender inequality within the family by transforming personal relationships within the family into a direct and unmediated relationship between a gender-neutral citizen and the state.

The language of national and imperial efficiency, which pervaded the ideology of motherhood as developed by both of these groups, reflected the

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

political terrain with which this ideology had to contend. On the one hand, as socialists committed to the establishment of collectivist principles, they were engaged in a struggle over the definition and form of collectivism against collectivist elements within alternative political groupings. On the other hand, as feminists they were also engaged in the struggle to imbue their own definition of collectivism with feminist principles. These were struggles which were taking place in relation not only to political groupings which were hostile to socialism and feminism, they lay also at the heart of socialism and feminism themselves.

The differences in the ideology of motherhood developed by the Women's Labour League and the Fabian Women's Group reflected more than the contradictory inheritance of feminism and socialism, they also reflected the contradictory consciousness of subjectivity within the working class. The Fabian Women's Group' analysis of the family showed an understanding of gender divisions on a personal level, which accorded with the views of some working class socialist feminists like Ada Nield Chew. But their belief in the possibility of a gender and class-neutral state emphasised the authoritarianism implicit in this version of state socialism. This consciousness of gendered ideology at the level of personal relationships between women and men was countermanded by a denial of consciousness and a corresponding stress on rationality and efficiency at the level of the relationship between the citizen and the state. It did not, therefore, accord with the lived experience of the women in the East End of London studied by Ellen Ross who opposed state interference on the grounds that it disrupted forms of collective help in local communities and removed control from their hands. The Women's Labour League, on the other hand, sought to protect and not destroy familial patterns. In this sense, they articulated the dominant opinion within the socialist movement and within the working-class. But they did so at the cost of acknowledging that both socialists and the working-class in general were divided along gender lines.

For both the Women's Labour League and the Fabian Women's Group an ideology of motherhood was articulated in an attempt to place women at the heart of the socialist project. However, the fact that they did so within the context of the larger political groups of which they formed a part illuminated the constraints upon that ideology. The Labour Party, because of its strong links with the trade union movement, the disparate nature of the Parliamentary Labour Party and its dependence upon the Liberal Party, embraced a morally conservative strand of socialism which privileged the position of the male worker within the family and perceived feminism as explicitly hostile to this project. The Fabian Society, because of its stress on the permeation of key social apparatuses and the neutrality of the state, privileged the citizen at the expense of understanding the manner in which gendered ideology informed all facets of social existence, including the state. It is at this level - the institutional level within socialism - that the feminist and socialist problematics manifested themselves, for equality and difference, independence and alliance structured the debates surrounding the ideology of motherhood and illuminated the problematic potentiality of consciousness within the working class.

The Women's Co-operative Guild, a body which was not structurally attached to any socialist organisation, sought to transcend these constraints by formulating an ideology of motherhood which denied the privilege accorded the male worker and incorporated the lived experience of working-class women. To this end, they supported endowment of motherhood but, at the same time, engaged in an educational programme of their members which endeavoured to show them that their domestic concerns were inextricably linked to the wider concerns of the political world. They therefore straddled the differing analyses and programmes of the WLL and the FWG. They were supported in their efforts by another organisation of women which, although led by socialists, was not specifically aligned to a particular socialist group; the Women's Industrial

Council. The Council was headed by Clementina Black, who had been a close friend of the Marx family. Past and current members included women from both the Women's Labour League and the Fabian Women's Group such as Margaret MacDonald¹⁵⁶ and Betty Hutchins.¹⁵⁷

In 1915 the results of a long inquiry into the work of married women were published by the Women's Industrial Council.¹⁵⁸ In her introduction Clementina Black remarked:

Despite the current theory that the wages of men are reckoned not on an individual but on a family basis, thousands of men are paid at rates which (even if received - as is very seldom the case - regularly throughout the year), are in fact barely sufficient to support properly one adult and one child; while the wages of thousands of women (based theoretically on the needs of an individual) are wholly inadequate to the proper support of one adult person. The earnings of man and wife together are, in thousands of households, inadequate, however industrious, however sober, however thrifty the pair, to the proper support of themselves and their children. Such are the main facts which emerge from our enquiry.¹⁵⁹

Black went on to say that those who saw married women's work as leading to a lessening of paternal responsibility and was destructive of the concept of a family wage were ignoring the basic fact that many men's wages were inadequate for the purpose of supporting a family. The solutions to the problems of under-payment, as she saw it, were several:

¹⁵⁶ Margaret MacDonald resigned from the Council in 1910 over both the conduct of the inquiry into married women's work and the question of leadership within the Council.

¹⁵⁷ B. L. Hutchins, 1858-1935, was a student at the London School of Economics around the turn of the century. Her membership of the Fabian Society probably stemmed from this association. In 1899 she also joined the Women's Industrial Council. Her involvement with both these groups led to the publication of two works. In 1903 she published, with Amy Harrison, A History of Factory Legislation and in 1915 she wrote Women In Modern Industry.

¹⁵⁸ Clementina Black, ed., Married Women's Work, (1915). Virago, London 1983.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid* p. 12.

In one direction lies the effort towards the establishment of a minimum wage,¹⁶⁰ in another the tendency to introduce improved methods of child nurture and saving of domestic labour,¹⁶¹ in yet a third the demand for the endowment of mothers and the right of wives to a fixed share of their husbands' incomes.¹⁶² It is possible that society is evolving in the direction of a family supported financially by the earnings of both parents, the children being cared for meanwhile and the work of the house being performed by trained experts. To me personally that solution seems more in harmony with the general lines of our social development than does any which would relegate all women to the care of children combined with the care of households.¹⁶³

All the women's political groups in the period to 1914 were engaged in a critical struggle to re-shape the face of politics in Britain from a socialist feminist standpoint. But the discussion above shows how far socialism had moved away from William Morris's anti-parliamentarianism and his stress on the need to make socialists. Their campaigns for social and political reforms in women's favour, such as the maternity benefit and the granting of the vote, were successful. Yet the inclusion and participation of women as citizens in the affairs of the state did not bring about the socialist society they expected. To gain some understanding of why this did not happen it is necessary to return to the writings of one of the few outspoken working-class women of this period, Ada Nield Chew. Chew argued that: 'We are so used to "keeping" women - to herding them together as a dependent

160 Both the Women's Trade Union League and the National Federation of Women Workers under Gertrude Tuckwell and Mary Macarthur supported this demand through the establishment of Trade Boards.

161 This proposal was supported by all the women's groups across the socialist feminist political spectrum.

162 This campaign had the support primarily of the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Fabian Women's Group.

163 C. Black, ed., Married Women's Work, p. 14.

whole - that there is another point which seldom occurs to us. They are individuals, and differ individually.'¹⁶⁴

There is, quite naturally, much confusion of thought as to what is the part of maternal duty in that long and careful tending of the young human plant which is necessary before we can produce the fully developed adult human being. The confusion arises from the fact that the maternal part is mixed up in some of our minds inextricably with what are regarded as equally sacred duties - duties to houses and clothes, to pots and pans, and to food. We can never think clearly about this matter till we accustom our minds to regard women as individual human beings...Most difficulties are caused by our age-long habit of looking upon what is, and what has been, as altogether desirable.¹⁶⁵

It was precisely at this level of common sense that the socialist feminists attached to the Labour Party needed to conduct their challenge on behalf of working-class women. But the language of the ideology of motherhood, whether it be couched in terms of a sacred duty or imperial efficiency, inhibited this development. It certainly enabled women to achieve reforms, but it did so in a manner which either did not fundamentally alter the gendered consciousness of the working class and the Labour Party, or did not challenge the elitism implicit in the concept of a class and gender-neutral state. Of course, it could be argued that this was not the intention of either the WLL or the FWG. Nevertheless, the results of the investigations carried out by the Women's Industrial Council and the Women's Co-operative Guild showed that women needed both relief within the home and outside employment, for the reality of most working-class women's lives was either a constant struggle to survive on a man's wage (often referred to as a 'family wage' but in reality it was never calculated on this basis), or long hours and poor pay in factories or a combination of the two.

¹⁶⁴ Ada Nield Chew, 'Mother-Interest and Child-Training' in D. Nield Chew, ed., Ada Nield Chew. The Life and writings of a Working Woman, p. 251.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 248-249.

The achievements of all the women's groups under examination here must be seen to lie in their astute recognition of the complex interrelationship between gender and class oppression. If they failed to provide an overarching solution it was not only because they had to contend with the weight of tradition within the socialist and labour movements, and that of feminism, but also because they were campaigning in a period of great social, political and industrial turmoil. Their steady course between the two traditions was perhaps the only way they could place the needs of women upon the political agenda - and this they succeeded in doing. In the process, they took a leading role in convincing women that the Labour Party, for all its obvious deficiencies, was the only political party capable of representing their interests.

CONCLUSION

I opened this thesis by looking at the disquiet expressed by a number of contemporary feminists over what they perceived to be a disturbing shift in emphasis within feminist analyses, from assertions of equality to those of difference. Much of this disquiet arose as a result of the parallels they drew with the period under examination, wherein this shift was held to be the major contributory factor in the demise of 'first wave' feminism. Through the study undertaken in this thesis of the history of the women's trade union and suffrage movements, and the later development of women's political groups, it would appear on a highly superficial level that just such a shift in emphasis was indeed evident.

Yet this statement, by itself, serves to obscure as much as it reveals, for it suggests that feminists were faced with a clear choice between two seemingly irreconcilable polarities. As Chapter One showed, there was no such clear choice; assertions of difference and arguments for equality were intertwined elements at the very moment of formation of modern feminism from the late eighteenth century. Through the use of the feminist and socialist problematics - equality and difference; independence and alliance - I have endeavoured to demonstrate that an analysis of the relationship between feminism and socialism cannot be reduced to this simple choice. Lived experience is complex and contradictory. As Sheila Rowbotham has written:

It is evident that human beings live contradictions. We are not neat ideological packages. A simple political resolve towards sexual equality can go through an infinite number of psychological sausage machines. There have been the most complex cultural contortions in the relations between men and women who are convinced of feminism, yet find themselves reverting persistently to habits and identities which do not fit the pared-down concepts. Patterns of subordination and power pummelled firmly into shape in one quarter have a disturbing

capacity to pop up round the corner clad in a new outfit and bright as a daisy, or turn inside out and alternate their colours.¹

It is by exploring these contradictions, rather than simply the connections, that an understanding of the relationship between feminism and socialism can penetrate beneath the surface of apparently unproblematic statements and events. Thus, for example, the organisational transition of the Women's Trade Union League, from Emma Paterson's establishment of separate women-only unions to Mary Macarthur's ultimate realisation of amalgamation with the Trades Union Congress in 1921, can be read on one level as a political development representing the detachment of women's trade unionism from liberalism towards socialism. Macarthur, and her co-leader Gertrude Tuckwell, expressed this political development in feminist terms as a shift away from difference towards equality. Yet the price of equality with male trade unionists was ultimately the institutional and ideological acceptance of a fundamentally essentialist concept of difference as articulated by gendered ideology. There was no easy or guaranteed transition from one assertions of equality to those of difference or vice versa. Rather, this process needs to be seen as one of negotiation within boundaries which were neither entirely fixed nor absolutely fluid. The formulation and promulgation of a specific ideology of motherhood by women trade union leaders in the first two decades of the twentieth century represented one form of negotiation within those ambivalent boundaries. Like an archeological dig, the history of women's trade unionism in relation to their male counterparts is composed of these different levels of sedimentation and interpretation.

Conversely, the history of the Women's Social and Political Union can be read as a political development away from socialism towards conservatism,

¹ Sheila Rowbotham, 'What Do Women Want? Woman-Centred Values and the World As It Is'. *Feminist Review*. Issue 20. 1985. p. 53.

as its leaders Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst severed their connections with the Independent Labour Party and embraced the Conservative Party. But this rupture in organisational affiliation has obscured our view of the latent constitutionalism and commitment to the *status quo* which was always present in the demand for the vote alone. In this instance, it was their recognition of gendered ideology within the socialist movement which sparked the transition by the leaders of the WSPU from assertions of equality to those of difference. Militancy represented the point at which this transition occurred because whilst it strained the boundaries of what constituted 'womanly' behaviour it also provoked a strong re-assertion of 'womanly' values. The culmination of this tragic course was the negotiation of another, quite different, ideology of motherhood which equated the defence of the motherland with a fervent nationalism and militarism.

But, once again, there was nothing guaranteed or determined about this process. The other large suffrage body, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, was drawn into a closer relationship with the Labour Party following the failure of the Liberal Party to exhibit any commitment to women's suffrage. For some of its members who later became active in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom these connections found expression in an assertion of equality which broke gender, class and national divisions. In this particular instance, these women promulgated an ideology of motherhood which transcended the difference/equality problematic by stressing that the values attributed to motherhood were those which were vital in order to create freedom and equality for all people.

The complex history of the relationships between feminism and socialism has formed the subject of this thesis. The various threads which caused that relationship to be so complex and problematic now need to be drawn together. Writing of the struggle socialists in Britain today face when

trying to capture the hearts and minds of the working class, Stuart Hall said:

Once we abandon the guarantee that working class ideas will 'inevitably tend towards socialism' as their given, teleological end, or that everything else follows once socialism begins, it has to be acknowledged that sexist and racist and jingoist ideas have deeply penetrated and naturalised themselves in sectors of working class thinking. Such ideas - frequently drawing exactly on 'immediate experience', and simply mirroring it - are not consonant with socialism. In the name of socialism itself (not in the name of some superior wisdom) they will have to be interrogated, corrected, transformed, *educated*. And, without falling back into vanguardism we must - for all our sakes - find a way of undertaking this far-reaching political and ideological struggle *against* 'working class common sense' *inside* the class itself.²

It is precisely this struggle within common sense which has characterised the relationship between feminism and socialism in the period under examination. But common sense, as reflexive of lived experience and social reality, is a complex amalgam of disparate, often contradictory, elements. As Gramsci wrote: 'Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space.'

It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.³

Common sense, particularly in the fragmentary sense in which Gramsci used it, provides the key to understanding the many diverse forms of feminism and socialism in existence during this period. It is because

² Stuart Hall, 'The Battle For Socialist Ideas In The 1980s'. In The Socialist Register 1982 Merlin Press, London 1982. pp. 5-6.

³ Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., Selections From The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. Lawrence & Wishart, London 1971. p. 419.

common sense is fragmentary and never guaranteed that, firstly, feminist and socialist movements could arise in opposition to the dominant culture and, secondly, that there should be differences between them. We have seen this to be so in the labourist ideology of skilled trade unionists, where a strong assertion of class consciousness co-existed with an articulation of gendered ideology which rendered women's experiences as workers marginal. Similarly, one of the dominant strands within feminist thought - that of constructing women as a sex-class - asserted women's common experiences to the detriment sometimes of an understanding of the factors which also divided them.

Common sense has a further significance: it is not merely a reflection of hegemonic ideology, though it is influenced by it, rather, common sense is the linguistic expression of a contested consciousness, which draws upon the past even as it is shaped by the present. At moments of crisis, when the hegemonic ideology of the dominant culture is under threat, common sense can be transformed into a 'philosophy of praxis', which, to paraphrase Gramsci, 'renovates and makes "critical" an already existing activity'.⁴ It is here that feminism and socialism share a common history; both have found fullest expression during such moments of crisis and have attempted to transform and make critical those aspects of common sense which are already 'at odds' with hegemonic ideology.

The period covered by this thesis, 1883-1914, represented one such moment as an ideological attachment to *laissez-faire* was displaced by collectivism. All areas of social existence, the political, the economic and the social, were affected by these developments. Feminists and socialists, as we have seen, were engaged in a critical struggle for a purchase in the formation of this new society. Both feminists and socialists were possessed of a common dream - a vision of an alternate world devoid of

⁴ Ibid. pp. 330-331.

oppressive relations. But whilst dreams can be shared, they are also intensely personal. The social world in which those dreams arose and were articulated was already divided by gender and class. Moreover, it was constructed in such a way as to express and reflect the aspirations and desires of one gender and one class only - bourgeois men. Feminists and socialists had to contend with this dichotomous social view, as it influenced their own lives, even as they sought to transform and transcend it.

The key to understanding the problematic nature of the relationship between feminism and socialism lies in the manner in which this dichotomous social view penetrated and suffused all facets of social existence - particularly those areas deemed, as a consequence of this division, public and private. It was within these two realms that personal and political aspirations came together, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in harmony. Because femininity and masculinity were constructed differently, according to this polarised ideology of bourgeois individualism, the dreams of a new social order were themselves differentiated by individual feminists and socialists. In other words, their dreams reflected the society in which they arose even as they sought to transcend the boundaries of that society. Thus the shared aspirations of feminists and socialists were intersected at every level by the constraints of this divisive social order.

The transcendence of these divisions lay at the heart of the socialist feminist project as articulated by women such as Enid Stacy, Ada Nield Chew, Selina Cooper, Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper, and by men such as William Morris and Edward Carpenter. It was an inspirational project which captured the imaginations of many people through the breadth of its vision and the beauty of its goal. However, at the same time as this vision was being forged new forms of oppression were emerging as a result of the

development of monopoly capitalism and the growth of British imperialism. Those with a vested interest in monopoly capitalism and imperialism were, like the feminists and socialists, also engaged in a struggle to capture the hearts and minds of the population. A nationalist discourse was formed which utilised the ostensibly gender and class-neutral concept of citizenship to facilitate that engagement. In the process, those aspects of common sense which articulated an adherence to the traditions and the characteristics of the British nation were subtly moulded by the state in order to ensure the success of that struggle. 54

William Morris understood only too clearly the power of the state to re-group itself in times of threat. It was for this reason that he stressed the need for continuous education within the socialist movement alongside the need to educate and convert those outside the movement. However, Morris was unable to connect this educative policy with a coherent strategy for socialism because of the emphasis he put upon the necessity for independence from all forms of collaboration with existing institutions within society. As the trade union movement represented the largest organisation of workers, such a policy of independence meant that Morris's vision of a new society failed to influence those members of the working class whose experiences informed them that concessions could be won by negotiation. This question of strategy was one which was also of deep concern to some socialists, as Hugh Holmes Gore from Bristol wrote: 55 54

What exercises the minds of some of us, however, is a kind of consciousness that we have not considered the road at all. We have pictured the ultimate condition of Society, we have urged the wisdom, even the necessity, of its accomplishment, but we have failed so far to explain the rule of the road thither. Hitherto the work of the Socialist has been to explain the Socialist state, and kindle a desire of its accomplishment. This is the first necessary step. We must know what we want and where to get it. The next step is to go forth and fetch it. It 23.

is here that we fail; we have not defined clearly the road, nor even realised that there is one.⁵

The failure articulated here by Holmes Gore represented the inability of the visionary socialism preached by, pre-eminently, Morris to become a 'philosophy of praxis'. By refusing to advocate participation in the main arena of working-class struggle - the trade union movement - this particular form of socialism could not interrogate and make critical the common sense of workers, despite the fact that Morris himself understood that unless this occurred socialism would always be contained by the boundaries of parliamentarianism. In the specific case of the Socialist League, this was a tactical error which was born of the problematic history of socialism in England, when the 'utopian' socialism of the Owenites met the class consciousness of the Chartists, as well as of the enormity of the task of changing consciousness. As a consequence, those areas of social existence which had become naturalised within the common sense of the working class remained unchallenged.

It was at this point, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, that feminist and socialist dreams appeared to diverge. What became the dominant discourse within socialism, which was morally conservative and tended towards a 'vulgar' economistic Marxism, represented a narrowing down of the socialist vision. This made the dreams of male socialists more limited and yet seemingly easier to obtain than the all-embracing project of changing consciousness. Their dreams were more limited precisely because in those areas of personal life where consciousness and subjectivity were inherited, acquired and transmitted, and where common sense was framed, a positive and strong masculine identity was asserted. The acceptance of this identity by male socialists may not have corresponded with lived reality

⁵ Hugh Holmes Gore, 'The Rule of the Road'. The Labour Prophet, May 1895. Quoted in Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896'. History Workshop Journal Issue 4. Autumn 1977. p. 45.

where the social relations of industrial capitalism produced a countervailing tendency whereby skills and authority within the workplace were being replaced by a more penetrating division of labour. However, it did represent a defensive position which asserted their desires of how relations should be within the public world of work, as well as an expression of relations within the private world of the home and family.

A conjunction was, therefore, effected in the personal realm between hegemonic ideology and the common sense, the lived reality, of working class men. This conjunction or coincidence in private life obviated the need on the part of the majority of male socialists to question relations in that area and led to the dominance of gendered ideology within the socialist movement as a whole. Thus the socialist vision was projected outwards into the more 'objective' realms of politics and economics - realms which were seemingly easier to change. It took a rare man like Edward Carpenter, a homosexual, to link the socialist project with personal life and to perceive the way in which gender permeated all life. However, even Carpenter's vision of a future society where sexual and social oppression had been abolished was predicated upon a form of biological determinism. His positioning of 'Urnings' - homosexuals - at the centre of this struggle for an androgynous future, and the careful distinction he drew between innate and acquired homosexuality, ultimately rested upon the very biological determinism which he sought to destroy. As Stephen Winsten has written:

Carpenter...was always sorry that he was not a woman. He felt that he thought like a woman, he thought that he felt like a woman, and that his Love's Coming of Age might have been written by a woman. He summed up his mind: "The workings of the feminine mind and nature have always been perfectly open and clear to me. By a sort of intuition I never have any difficulty in following those workings. They enshrined no mystery for me."⁶

⁶ Stephen Winsten, Salt and His Circle Hutchinson, London 1951. p. 116.

Carpenter's attempt to solve the problem of oppressive relations between women and men demonstrated just how intractable and elusive those relations proved to be.

As far as feminists were concerned, the attainment of their dreams was infinitely more difficult because they had to struggle against an articulation of feminine subjectivity by a gendered ideology which defined them in a negative way and on male terms. Feminists themselves accepted this definition even as they sought to modify it. This was true of the majority of feminists, regardless of their political affiliations. Thus, feminists who emerged from the Liberal tradition/seized upon gender difference as the reason why they were entitled to representation in Parliament and the professions. It was a concept of difference which was based upon the notion of complementary halves rather than an hierarchical division.⁷ Socialist feminists, on the other hand, especially those who operated within socialist organisations, proclaimed an identity of interest with male socialists. It was a concept of equality which denied gender antagonism between female and male socialists. Here, as in the case of Liberal feminists, women and men were seen to form complementary halves of a human whole.

Nevertheless, even though the majority of Liberal and socialist feminists denied an hierarchical division between the sexes, the history of modern feminism from the time of Mary Wollstonecraft, whether it was expressed in terms of difference or of equality, was framed within the context of a society which was both hierarchical and androcentric. What made the feminist project so difficult was the fact that so many feminists were related to men who were active in politics. Thus, Lady Dilke was married to Sir Charles Dilke, the Liberal politician, Margaret MacDonald, Mary

⁷ See Sandra Stanley Holton, Feminism and Democracy. Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986. p.13.

Middleton, Mary Macarthur and Katharine Bruce Glasier were all married to Labour Party politicians, and Beatrice Webb and Maud Pember Reeves were married to men prominent within the Fabian Society. To have understood the extent to which gendered ideology had penetrated political, economic and social existence, would, therefore, have also meant questioning their own emotional lives and their relations with their husbands.

Those feminists who did at various times question social and sexual relations between women and men tended to be either single or were able to maintain an existence separate from that of their husbands. Thus Christabel Pankhurst remained unmarried, whilst Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper, Helena Born and Miriam Daniell, and Margaret Llewelyn Davies and Lillian Harris maintained strong emotional attachments to other women.⁸ Of the women who were married, such as Selina Cooper, Ada Nield Chew and Hannah Mitchell, their husbands appear to have faded into the background as they became more active socialist feminists.⁹ Moreover, each of these three married working class women restricted their families to one child only. For all of these feminists, however, active involvement in the struggle for liberation resulted in a collision between personal and political aspirations. As Hannah Mitchell wrote: 'Public disapproval could be faced and borne, but

⁸ From all the evidence available it would appear that these women were involved in lesbian relationships. However, because they were extremely reticent about their private lives it is very difficult to be certain of this. There is little doubt that Helena Born and Miriam Daniell were lesbians as their relationship, according to Angela Tuckett who was related to Miriam Daniell, had become known as a family scandal. Margaret Llewelyn Davies and Lillian Harris lived together for many years and referred to themselves as 'Jim' and 'John' respectively. See Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann, eds., The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Two 1912-1922. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York 1976. p. 119. Similarly, Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper lived together from 1896 to 1926.

⁹ See Jill Liddington, The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel. Selina Cooper 1864-1946. Virago, London 1984. pp. 337-339; Doris Nield Chew, ed., Ada Nield Chew. The Life and Writings of a Working Woman. Virago, London 1982. pp. 58-61; and Hannah Mitchell, The Hard Way Up. Virago, London 1977. pp. 28-31.

domestic unhappiness, the price many of us paid for our opinions and activities, was a very bitter thing.'¹⁰

The history of the relationship between feminism and socialism returns constantly to the sphere of personal relations between women and men. It was within the family that gendered ideology had its source and its perpetuation. The struggles feminists faced within the trade union movement, in the fight for women's suffrage and in political groups were themselves extensions of the conflicting desires which familial relations induced in people. This was one of the reasons why the main strategy of the majority of feminists became based around motherhood as it enabled them to advance the cause of women without putting in jeopardy the intimate ties between women and men. In the process, however, women sacrificed their autonomy for a male-defined equality within the Labour Party and the trade union movement.

The women and men in this thesis were pioneers, important predecessors for both the feminist and socialist movements today. Their struggles are, to a large extent, our own struggles. Once again, there is tension within the feminist movement over how far women should agitate for reforms and how far they should struggle for the transformation of all social relations. One of the most important political issues today has concerned the related question of whether feminists should ally themselves with a particular party or whether they should organise separately. The women workers from the north of England who were involved in women's trade union and suffrage groups, as well as the Independent Labour Party, have shown us that it is possible to have alliance and independence; that it is also possible to speak of equality whilst stressing the factors which make for difference. Theirs was a difficult and often lonely struggle in the face of a much larger movement towards wholehearted alliance with the leading representatives

¹⁰ H. Mitchell, The Hard Way Up p. 130.

of labour. Nevertheless, simply because they did not win the struggle for the hearts and minds of women and men does not mean that the struggle was unnecessary. As Barbara Taylor has written of contemporary socialist feminists:

We, and those who ally themselves with us, are the Utopians of today; and in the end the case for our cause - for feminist socialism - must become the case for Utopianism itself, for a style of socialist endeavour which aims to transform the whole order of social life and in so doing transforms relations between the sexes.¹¹

¹¹ Barbara Taylor, Eye and the New Jerusalem. Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, Virago, London 1983. p. xviii.

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¹ For ease of reference individual items within the microform collections which are of particular significance for this work have been cited separately under the appropriate primary source category. For an explanation of the abbreviations used see above under Microform Collections.

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